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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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Heavy Vetting

Well, that wore off fast. When Barack Obama strode into town in January, he brought with him a great wave of idealism. Inspired by the president and his "call to service," America's best and brightest mused aloud in their faculty lounges, law office suites, and investment banks about how they would gladly sacrifice their financial interests to serve their country.

Flash forward to early spring. Large blocks of government offices sit unfilled and critical jobs—those involved in managing the global economy, for example—go unperformed. Talk to those administration recruiters, and they'll complain about the difficulty of finding bodies to fill the posts. It's not that the nation's elite have lost faith in the new administration. It's that they have been deterred by one of the most rigorous human-resources operations in history, frightened away by a colonoscopy of a vetting process that, even if it uncovers no intentional improprieties, could uncover a small, innocent miscalculation in a tax filing that will be aired in the press and by hostile politicians as if it were an execrable act of malfeasance.

TIM MCPHERSON/GETTY

Exhibit A of this crisis is the Treasury Department. Since Tim Geithner took office more than six weeks ago, only one of the Treasury's 15 senior-level staff positions that require Senate confirmation has been filled (by a Bush administration holdover), leaving Geithner without the support that you'd want for the guy in charge of rescuing our financial system from oblivion. Most dishearteningly, three first-rate nominees—Annette Nazareth, H. Rodgin Cohen, and Caroline Atkinson—withdrew their names from consideration after the vetting process left them twisting for prolonged periods. And that's to say nothing of the swell of competent nominees who never even let things get that far.

Unfortunately, the appointments malaise has spread well beyond Treasury. According to *The Washington Post*, of the 71 nominees Obama has asked to join his administration, only 41 have been formally appointed and only 28 have been confirmed. Holdups in the nominating process reach from the Energy Department and the Pentagon to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. As the *Post* reported last week, the "intensified vetting process has left dozens of President Obama's picks to run the government mired in a seemingly endless confirmation limbo, frustrated and cut off from the departments they are waiting to serve and unable to perform their new duties."

Why the confirmation constipation? For one, there are more than a thousand presidential appointees that require Senate approval. Each has to pass a rigorous security check by the FBI, which conducts copious interviews not only with the nominee, but also with myriad acquaintances and colleagues. (One college president who was vetted for a part-time advisory-board position during the Clinton administration recalls FBI agents knocking on the doors of his fraternity-house neighbors to verify his character.)

Obama's insistence on having the most transparent administration in U.S. history has slowed the process even further, and his high-minded ethics standards have limited his ability to consider the full scope of talent. While the revolving door should be closed to lobbyists, there's something absurd about a process that treats human rights activists and consumer advocates as the ethical equivalent of K Street sharks, shutting them out of government.

What's more, the early tax snafus of Geithner, Tom Daschle, and Nancy Killefer have resulted in a vetting process—by both the administration and the Senate Finance Committee, which hired former IRS agents to comb through the nominees' tax records—that has discouraged a number of the government's top candidates for reasons that have nothing to do with their capacity to serve.

While these types of delays and pressures are a quadrennial ritual, this year is the reductio ad absurdum of a broken process—and we hope it will prompt reform. There are simple fixes. One is to streamline the FBI background checks, reducing the number of interviews required. Another is to eliminate the need for Senate confirmation for lower-level positions—a change that would likely be unpopular on the Hill but would speed up the nomination process considerably. Finally, the Senate should be forbidden from placing "holds" on nominees to grandstand on behalf of pet causes—as Senator Robert Menendez reportedly did last week when he put a hold on the nominations of two top science officials in order to protest the administration's Cuba policy.

Given that it has already faced several public scandals, we understand the administration's impulse to obsessively vet its nominees. But the perfect candidate does not always have the perfect resumé or, for that matter, a perfect understanding of the federal tax code. President Obama needs to streamline this process before he erodes not only the willingness to serve, but his own ability to govern. ◆

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Stock Answer

No, Obama didn't destroy your 401(k).

JONATHAN CHAIT

THE ONE conservative talking point that has gotten the most traction since Barack Obama won the election is that he's killing the stock market with his big-government agenda. Conservatives pundits started saying this in November, and mainstream news implies it constantly. "Stocks are down almost 19 percent since the Obama administration took office," reported ABC News recently. MSNBC has been endlessly featuring a graph of the stock market's decline since Obama took office. While Obama's economic policies have gotten plenty of things wrong, the idea that they can be judged by the stock market is unbelievably fatuous.

To understand this ubiquitous notion, let us start at the bottom of the conservative intellectual food chain and work our way up. The crudest version of the Obama Bear Market hypothesis is put forward by the likes of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Fred Barnes. Their favorite data point is that the market tanked at several key moments: the day after the 2008 presidential election, the day of Obama's inauguration, and the day he signed the economic stimulus bill. Clearly the markets panicked in reaction to Obama's incipient big-government, wealth-confiscating agenda, right?

Sure, unless you realize that those events just might have been priced into the market already. Obama, in case you forgot, was considered a lock before Election Day. (On election eve, Intrade had given Obama a 92 percent chance of winning.) Likewise, the vote that made the stimulus bill a *fait accompli* took place several days before the bill's signing. The real market-driving news came even earlier, when Obama unveiled his plan. Contemporaneous reports on the market reaction—*The New York Times*, December 9: "WALL STREET SURGES ON STIMULUS HOPES"—dug up little evidence of fears about socialism.

You may not believe me that pundits are citing the market's drop on January 20 as an indictment of Obama. It's true! "The Dow fell 332.13 points on inauguration day," noted Barnes, holding this up as evidence that "The market's view is that an Obamanomics-driven economy looks grim." I'm trying to figure out the operating theory here. One possibility is that, before January 20, investors thought Obama would get cold feet, or that maybe President Bush would surround the White House with tanks and stay forever. Alternatively, the markets did know Obama would assume the presidency that day, but got really depressed when it actually happened. Neither of these possibilities speak well of the stock market as a rational gauge of the country's economic future.

It is true, of course, that stocks have fallen sharply since Obama won the election. A recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial noted that the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 25 percent over the first two months of the year. "The dismaying message here," fretted the oh-so-earnest *Journal* editors, "is that President Obama's policies have become part of the economy's problem."

Well, this is more persuasive than the "Oh my God, some long-anticipated event has finally happened so I'm selling my stocks" hypothesis. But it still lacks some key details. Such as: maybe some other economic events triggered the sell-off? No way, continues the *Journal*:

> So what has happened in the last two months? The economy has received no great new outside shock. … What is new is the unveiling of Mr. Obama's agenda and his approach to governance.

Huh? First of all, Obama's agenda was unveiled well before the election. Second, there have been *constant* new economic shocks, from the massive downward revision of fourth quarter (pre-Obama) GDP to the collapse of economies across the world.

Indeed, American stocks are merely suffering the same drop as stocks in countries not subject to Obama's socialist agenda. While the Dow did fall by 25 percent over the first two months of 2009, the Global Dow fell by 26 percent. If Obama's agenda was the problem, then you'd think U.S. stocks would fall further and faster.

The larger fallacy here is to assume that the stock market is a proxy for the entire economy. Many people realize that the stock market is an imperfect gauge. But it's not just an imperfect gauge of the economy—it doesn't even attempt to measure the economy. Stock prices represent the market's guess at the profitability of corporations. While that's related to the health of the overall economy, it's not the same thing, and sometimes the two diverge sharply. During the Bush administration, for instance, corporate profits soared while wages for most families flatlined.

One clear instance where Obama hurt the stock market came when Tim Geithner announced the administration's financial rescue plan. Stocks dropped that day. Was this a fair indictment of the plan? Or a reaction to the possibility that the government might wipe out shareholders? In other words, was the market drop a signal that Obama's plan was bad for the economy as a whole or just bad for bank stocks? The two propositions mean very different things.

This, alas, is the very distinction the stock-mongers on television fail to grasp. The stock market has become the media's real-time economic report card. Economic statistics that actually measure broader material well-being come out once a month, some once a year, others once a decade. The stock market updates instantly, making it irresistible.

Cable channels, especially CNBC, have come to represent the stock-centric view of the world. Stock televangelist Jim Cramer, who has assailed Obama for "wealth destruction," perfectly embodies the narrowness of this view. "Stocks, along with housing, are our principal forms of wealth in this country," he asserts. In fact, according to University of Wisconsin economist John Karl Scholz, the richest 10 percent has more than half its net worth in stocks, but those in the middle have less than 4 percent of their net worth in equities.

As a case in point, Cramer assailed Obama for "destroying the profits in health care companies (one of the few areas still robust in the economy)." The United States has the most expensive, least efficient health care sector in the advanced world. The flipside of that inefficiency is massive profits in the health care sector. Anything that reduces waste necessarily reduces that profit. Cramer naturally sees this as a disaster. But why should the rest of us care? ◆

TRB
From Washington

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Long Shadow

Forget the GOP; Obama's enemy is the angry public.

Seventy-three years after a white-suited Huey Long was assassinated in Baton Rouge, the iron-fisted Louisiana governor is all the rage in Barack Obama's Washington. At a time when a crash course in the New Deal has supplanted Watergate studies as the capital's requisite history lesson, attention is suddenly being paid to the Kingfish, as well as radio priest Father Charles Coughlin, the two leading 1930s tribunes of little-man economic anger. When you sit down with Obama insiders, Long's name pops up in one conversation, Coughlin's in the next. "You have to remember," says one Obama adviser, "Huey Long and left-wing populism were a much bigger problem for Franklin Roosevelt than the Republicans."

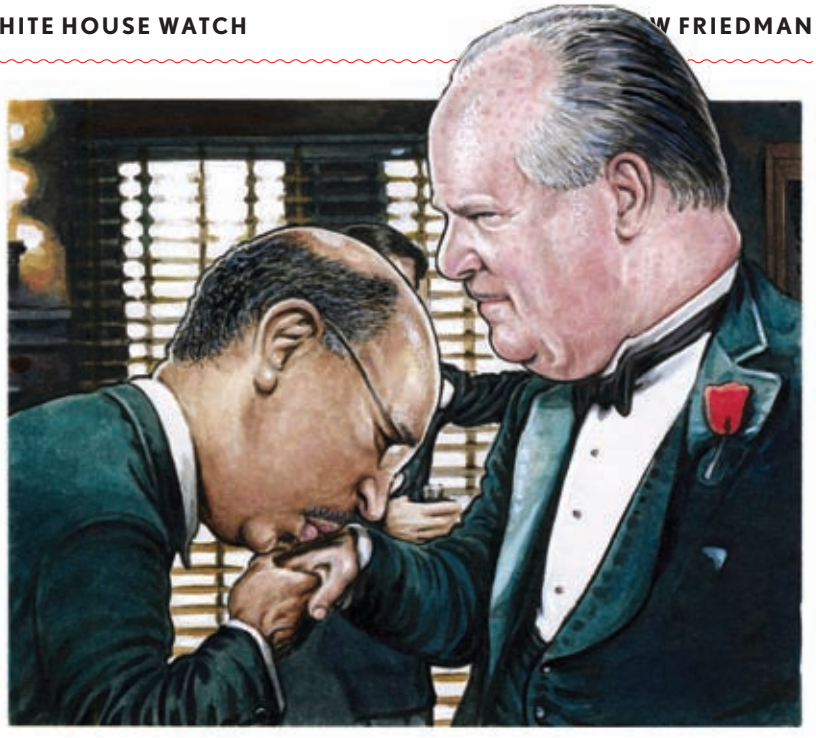
Comments like this underscore the historical reality that tough times can create irrational politics. Obama is obviously not graying or praying over the threat of a third-party challenge like the one that Long was preparing to mount against FDR in 1936. In fact, the real threat to the Obama administration may come from a corrosive anti-establishment rage that does not fit into any pre-existing political category.

Long—who dabbled at being a United States senator when he wasn't home running Louisiana from the floor of the state legislature—was the Pied Piper of class-based resentment, Hugo Chávez with a Southern accent. A large part of it was the easy-money allure of his "Share Our Wealth" plan. Long called for confiscatory taxation of all personal wealth over $8 million and outlandishly claimed that this swag from the Mellons and Rockefellers would finance a generous $5,000 grant to every U.S. household augmented by annual payments of at least $2,000. Father Coughlin (whose anti-Semitism was still muted during the early New Deal period) represented something even more potent—anti-banker, anti-Wall Street, conspiracy-theory-driven anger. Breaking with FDR in late 1934, Coughlin's radio-broadcast sermons from the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, Michigan, offered little in the way of coherent economic theory (his anti-capitalist ideal was vaguely akin to Mussolini's Italy), but was masterful at channeling the rage of his listeners at the shadowy international bankers.

This time around, demagoguery does not have to be particularly creative in concocting economic villains, since Central Casting has obligingly provided a rogue's gallery from the executive suites at Citigroup, AIG, Merrill Lynch and Bank of America. The kindling is there for a bonfire (or is it a bond fire?) of Wall Street's vanities. All it takes is a match. As Bob Borosage, the co-director of the left-of-center Campaign for America's Future, points out, "If the Roosevelt era is any parallel, you'll get both a left-wing populism and a right-wing populism. It was not just Huey Long, it was also Father Coughlin. There is an anger out there that is populist and will take right-wing and left-wing forms. And politicians on each end of the political parties—aided by populist rabble-rousers—will start to stoke this anger and move it."

Normally, the party out of power would be poised to exploit the undertone of uneasiness in the public mood.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH ...W FRIEDMAN



Rush Limbaugh: "No different than any powerful man."

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But, as Democratic pollster Mark Mellman points out with audible satisfaction, "When you have a populism that is anti-bank, anti-Republican and anti-business, it is hard to see what the right-wing component of that is." The punch-drunk Republicans (who only command the allegiance of 26 percent of the voters in a recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll) may prove as irrelevant to the national debate over the next few years as Alf Landon and company were during FDR's first term.

At the same time, unlike Democratic predecessors like Lyndon Johnson or Jimmy Carter, Obama does not have to brood about a political threat from his left flank. Even Vermont's independent socialist Senator Bernie Sanders offers praise for the new president: "I think, in general, Barack Obama is doing a very good job." For Capitol Hill left-wingers like Sanders, the emphasis is less on pressuring Obama and more on shining a spotlight on Wall Street for its rule of ruin. "We need a real investigation—not a sham investigation—about how this crisis did occur and who were the people pushing subprime loans and who were the people who fought for deregulation," Sanders says. "We need a real investigation and we need to hold people accountable."

Still, while it is a safe bet that neither Michael Steele's hip-hop Republicanism nor far-left anti-capitalist demagoguery is the wave of the future, that is about all we know with confidence about voter attitudes. The lasting psychological ramifications of the economic collapse cannot yet fully be understood because the loss of traditional financial cushions (retirement savings, the appreciated value of a home, the time-honored annual raise) is simply too raw and recent. Republican pollster David Winston, who has watched more than his share of focus groups from behind one-way glass walls, captures the way that the political world has tilted off its axis: "What you're seeing in the public right now is not anger but terror. They don't know who to believe. They just know it's bad." Winston adds, "The political system is still learning how to respond to an electorate that is terrified."

But terror may be turning gradually into fury. A sense of the growing ire of voters toward Wall Street comes from the Harris Poll, which has been charting public attitudes toward the financial community for more than a decade. Asked in late February whether "most successful people on Wall Street deserve to make the kind of money they earn," only 30 percent of those surveyed said yes, as opposed to 51 percent in 1997. Moreover, only 26 percent of Americans in the February 2009 Harris Poll believed that "people on Wall Street are as honest and moral as other people." (In the 1997 survey, that figure was 51 percent.)

That other 74 percent are the Americans to whom Obama spoke when he warned in his address to Congress, "We cannot afford to govern out of anger" and pledged, "I will not spend a single penny for the purpose of rewarding a single Wall Street executive." The public view in the Obama camp is that the voters—with the help of a little inspirational leadership from the president—recognize that the twin lions of patience and fortitude are required at this time of national testing. As Obama pollster Joel Benenson says, "Every piece of polling data I've seen—public or internal—shows that the American people understand the complexity of the problem and how it will take a longer time to fix than we're used to."

But the reality is that apolitical populism—a spasmodic outpouring of ideologically incoherent rage—could easily drown Obama's inevitable request for more bank bailout funds. The White House, according to insiders, is very concerned that pitchfork-wielding voters are already raging against any future bailouts of the banking industry or even Detroit. Mellman, whose polling clients are on Capitol Hill, says, "People are angry. And the angrier they get, the greater are the limits to political action on behalf of the banks." As a result, the contours of Tim Geithner's rescue scheme may not matter, though recent history suggests that the details will only be comprehensible to those with Ph.D.s in Rube Goldberg Studies. Rahm Emanuel's ability to browbeat recalcitrant House Democrats may not matter. Nor will Harry Reid's likely fecklessness in the face of a Republican filibuster.

None of this, of course, is inevitable. But conventional political metrics like Obama's approval rate can blind us to how easily anxiety can be transformed into anger and apoplexy. Faced with the parched economic landscape and the ruins of the once proud towers of personal financial security, many voters are as bewildered as the character Muley in the movie version of *The Grapes of Wrath* who cannot figure out who to blame for being forced off the land by the foreclosure of his farm. He's told that it is not really the sheriff, the land agent, or even the bank in Tulsa. "Then," Muley asks, "who do we shoot?"

WALTER SHAPIRO

Walter Shapiro has covered the last eight presidential elections.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

In "Iran Amok" (March 18), the Washington Institute for Near East Policy was misidentified as the Washington Institute for Near East Peace. We regret the error.

MBA Frayed

Biz school sees its stock plummet.

BACK IN OCTOBER, not long after Lehman Brothers collapsed and triggered a meltdown on Wall Street, one of the hottest e-mail forwards making the rounds among finance types was a letter by Andrew Lahde, a hedge-fund manager who had posted eye-popping 866 percent returns in 2008 by betting on increases in U.S. subprime mortgage defaults. Lahde was getting out on top, and his "So long, suckers!" missive made headlines—partly for his broadsides against predatory lenders, partly for his earnest digression in support of hemp products, and partly for his boasts about getting rich at the expense of Wall Street's "low hanging fruit, i.e., idiots whose parents paid for prep school, Yale, and then the Harvard MBA." These MBA grads, Lahde sneered, "who were (often) truly not worthy of the education they received (or supposedly received) rose to the top of companies such as AIG, Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers and all levels of our government."

And, with that, Lahde had kicked off a new round of scapegoating: What *had* they been teaching our nation's best and brightest in these MBA programs, anyway? A few days later, the usually prim *Financial Times* mocked the champagne-swigging alumni at Harvard Business School's 100-year anniversary gala as they quietly squirmed over their responsibility for the mess. ("We will leave the talk of fixing the blame to others," Harvard's dean assured the gathering.) *BusinessWeek* piled on, hosting an online debate: "Business schools are largely responsible for the U.S. financial crisis. Pro or con?"

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Nowadays, it's getting harder to find a business school professor who isn't agonizing over what Wall Street–bound students might have taken away from their classes. "In a way, finance professors caused this problem—I'm not bragging about this," says Charles Trzcinka, who chairs the finance department at Indiana University–Bloomington's Kelley School of Business. He points out that many of the financial tools that played a starring role in the current crisis, from the countless ways to divvy up and sell mortgage-backed securities to the explosion of credit default swaps, were taught and developed in business schools without, often, a full appreciation for how they could go sour—if, say, housing prices cratered or large counterparties went bust.

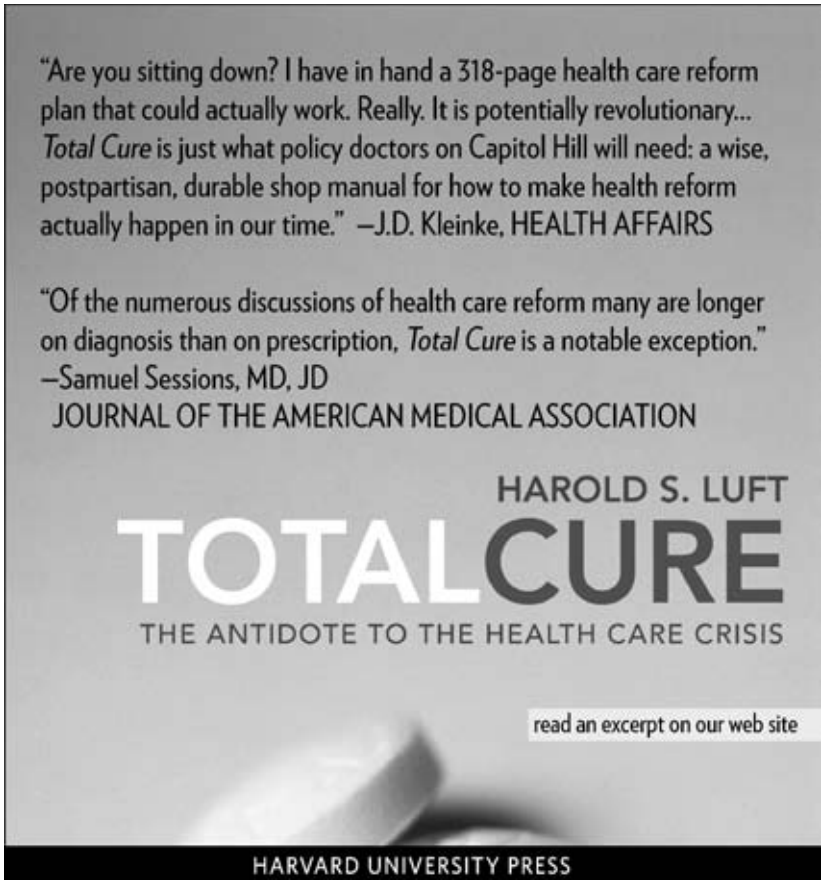
Business schools aren't, of course, primarily responsible for the implosion of global finance: On the list of culprits, they rank well below the bursting real-estate bubble, skyrocketing bank leverage, and the decline of regulatory oversight. Plus, it's not as if everyone on Wall Street has an MBA—though the list of failed bank CEOs educated at top-tier b-schools, from Lehman's Dick Fuld to Merrill Lynch's John Thain, is suspiciously long. But, across the country, business-school faculties are grappling with the possibility that they've been instilling generations of students with a naïve faith in free markets, teaching them to focus solely on short-term profits, and justifying some of the more outrageous executive-compensation schemes that have become Exhibit A in the case against corporate America. Many of those notions are tumbling quickly. But what comes after the fall?

Business schools weren't always so closely identified with unchecked capitalism. When the first management schools opened in the United States—Wharton in 1881, Harvard Business School in 1908—their wealthy founders were worried to a large degree about social legitimacy. Big corporations were only just arriving on the scene, and the public was still wary of these new behemoths, especially in the wake of countless bloody labor disputes. Partly as a defensive measure, business schools tried to show that companies could be managed in the public interest. During the 1930s, Harvard faculty taught courses emphasizing the legitimate role of regulation and researched issues like the psychological strain facing workers in the Depression. This impulse carried into the postwar period—business elites were trained to act as elder statesmen who would, at least in theory, work in partnership with civil society groups, labor, and government. "It was fueled by patriotic fervor. … The view was that, if you wanted to avoid radicalism in America, you needed well-trained, enlightened managers who didn't wield their authority arbitrarily, but used it constructively," explains Rakesh Khurana, a professor at Harvard Business School and author of *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands*, a history of business schools.

This whole mindset started to wobble during the economic malaise of the '70s. Disgruntled investors blamed unfocused executives for mismanaging their empires at the expense of shareholders. A younger generation of academics started arguing for hostile takeovers and deregulation to make companies leaner and, well, meaner—and they endorsed Milton Friedman's idea that managers should focus solely on stock prices. After all, according to the efficient-market hypothesis, short-term share prices were the best marker of a company's health. What's more, managers, who were untrustworthy by nature, required proper incentives, such as stock options, to ensure their interests were properly aligned. (As corporate raider T. Boone Pickens complained in 1985, too many managers "don't relate to the shareholders' interests because they aren't substantial shareholders themselves.")

Business schools didn't just reflect these new trends—they helped amplify them. Modern MBA classes may focus on dry technical skills—from negotiation strategies to, say, learning four different ways to calculate the Weighted Average Cost of Capital—but a distinct sensibility still manages to seep through. One survey by the Aspen Institute in 2001 tracked a generation of MBAs over two years and found a "shift in priorities": Students started downplaying their responsibilities to employees or the community or even customers; the shareholder became king. "It's easy to caricature all those automotive execs now flying to D.C. in private jets [to ask for bailout money]," Khurana told me. "But look at the model they were operating in. They've never had to think about things like social legitimacy—what did that have to do with maximizing shareholder value?"

In recent decades, the swelling of the U.S. financial sector has meant boom times for b-schools. The parade of corporate scandals in 2002 barely blunted the momentum—many deans blamed the Enrons of the world on a few rotten apples and simply mandated new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ethics classes like Harvard's "Leadership and Corporate Accountability," where students could read about the rise and fall of Ken Lay and discuss Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail." (Less explored was the possibility that a single-minded focus on short-term stock gains might have helped lead to all those misstated earnings and back-dated stock options.) By 2007, some elite business schools were shipping out roughly 40 percent of their graduates to large investment banks, hedge funds, and private equity firms, while students were elbowing their way into electives like "Corporate Financial Engineering."

Trouble was, many students weren't exactly taking Ph.D. courses. "There were so many people who just wanted to learn enough to get a job in this field," says Trzcinka. "This market was full of people who were really just salesmen. You'd get them in class and ask them questions [about the latest financial innovations], and, for the first ten minutes, they sound sophisticated. Then you probe a little deeper, and, for the next ten, they're an idiot." Out in the corporate world, many managers failed to grasp the subtleties and limitations of the boggling mathematical models that were helping them earn outsized returns. "Look at Lehman Brothers in 2005—if you were one of the chief risk officers, what could you have done to convince senior management that you were heading for disaster?" asks Andrew Lo, who teaches financial engineering at MIT. "I'd argue virtually nothing. Unless senior management understood these models to the extent that [their quantitative analysts] did, there's no way you could convince them to pull back—business was too profitable."

Nor were faculty members sounding as many warnings about Wall Street as they could have. "Our tendency was just to get excited by the novelty—and by our belief that markets could do no wrong," says Jay Lorsch, a professor of human relations at Harvard Business School. Lorsch points out that most MBA programs have to maintain friendly ties with the corporate world—professors often consult on the side and work closely with companies to develop case studies, while business schools depend on big firms to send students to their executive programs. "This all created a tendency to go along with the business community, to not be too critical."

Naturally, there are also less-forgiving takes. Henry Mintzberg, a professor of management studies at McGill University and a longtime critic of business schools, insists that the whole MBA model is fatally flawed—management isn't something you can teach in a classroom, and the idea that you *can* has bred a dangerous sort of arrogance. "Look at the case-study method they teach at Harvard," he says. "You read [about] companies you know nothing about, and you come in to class and are forced to pronounce on what those companies should do. You've got no in-depth knowledge at all—you're just shooting your mouth off!" Mintzberg didn't seem shocked that many MBAs brought this swagger to Wall Street. "My recommendation? Close them all down, period."

Not everyone's ready to fall on their swords just yet, but, these days, the deep recession and bleak job market, coupled with mass outrage over multimillion-dollar executive pay packages, have led to a genuine sense that something's gone badly awry. At Wharton this spring, a new class on the financial crisis filled its 300 spots in less than 48 hours. And it's not just that professors are putting more emphasis on smarter risk-management and asset bubbles. Economic theories that would have been heretical 20 years ago—the idea, say, that people and markets don't always behave rationally—are being greeted with fresh interest. At Harvard, informal debates are said to be breaking out in faculty lounges about whether professors should focus more on teaching students how to run businesses that are sustainable in the long-term, rather than just pawning off the latest hedging techniques.

Still, the changes amount to something less than an outright revolution. When I asked current MBA students what sorts of things they *weren't* hearing discussed in class, the list of still-too-delicate topics included: whether executive pay schemes might have led people to take excessive risks; whether investment banks are really "value creating"; and, of course, what role MBAs might have played in the current crisis. Khurana told me that business schools still need to have a perhaps-uncomfortable discussion about their broader purpose in the world—a question that involves pondering "the fundamental relationship between the economy and society." Not the sort of thing, alas, that's easy to stick in a textbook.

Bradford Plumer

Teddy's Bear

Orrin Hatch, health care reform's stealth champion.

If Senator Orrin Hatch is a liberal-friendly health care reformer, he's working under some pretty deep cover. Just two months ago, Hatch voted against the reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), protesting the inclusion of legal immigrants and higher-income children as a "partisan exercise." When President Obama released his budget proposal, Hatch warned that health care reform under his administration's watch could be a nightmare. "[T]his reckless budget will swamp Americans in a morass of debt and mortgage the future of our children and grandchildren," the Utah senator thundered in a press statement. Hatch's remarks echoed his scathing criticism of the stimulus bill,

Nick Craine

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whose health provisions he denounced on the Senate floor as the "Socialized Health Care for All Act of 2009."

But Hatch's Senate colleagues have noticed some disparities between his public fulminations and his private actions. Four days before railing against Obama's budget, Hatch was standing with his fellow legislators on the Senate floor, shortly before the call to walk over as a group for the president's joint address to Congress. He took the time to speak to Democratic Senator Max Baucus, chairman of the Finance Committee, and said that he wanted to help him push for a bipartisan consensus on comprehensive reform. "What Hatch telegraphed was, 'I'm in the fundamental reform camp, I want to do something big,'" says one senior Democratic staffer. "You've made a commitment to work together."

When I talked to Hatch last week, he brushed off the Baucus incident as a routine conversation with a Democratic colleague. "I work very hard to accommodate people," he said. But, in fact, further conversations with Hatch and health care advocates on the Hill and beyond have suggested a very personal, profound reason why Hatch may be throwing his powerful weight behind "Socialized Health Care": his decades-long friendship with Ted Kennedy, the ailing patriarch of the universal health care movement. "I would like to do [health care reform] as a legacy issue for [Kennedy], if I can—this would mean a lot to him," Hatch told me.

Hatch and Kennedy first came together as adversaries on the Senate Labor Committee in 1977, where Hatch—an accomplished off-duty songwriter—jokes that he damaged his singing voice from wrangling over labor-law reform with his liberal colleague. Within a term, though, the two learned to compromise, and their ensuing friendship became part of Washington lore. "Sometimes I've been the chairman, sometimes he's been my chairman," Kennedy says. "But we've always been able to work together." Hatch recounts the early antics of Washington's "legislative odd couple" with a teasing, domestic familiarity. Before smoking was banned, Kennedy would regularly puff away at cigars in the committee room, much to the dismay of his Mormon colleague. "You could normally tell whether we were fighting by the amount of smoke he would send my way," Hatch writes in his autobiography. "If our differences were great … Ted would lean back in his chair, puffing away, knowing he was giving me a headache that was more than just political." Hatch had his own way of needling Kennedy when he wanted to press him on an issue: He'd threaten to call Kennedy's sister, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, who was also a close friend of his. "If he'd get reluctant, I'd say, 'OK, Teddy, I'm going to go see Eunice,'" Hatch told me. "And then she'd tell [Kennedy], 'Don't you dare mistreat that nice young senator!'"

Conservative detractors soon claimed that it was Kennedy who had gotten the better half of the relationship, watching as Hatch repeatedly bucked the expectations of his own party to enable Kennedy to achieve legislative breakthroughs on workplace privacy, federal support for child care, and civil rights for the disabled. And, largely because of Kennedy's particular passion for health care, Hatch has time and again broken with his party in this arena. From his early years in the Senate, he has prided himself for being able to forge bipartisan deals on health care, including the Hatch-Waxman overhaul of the Food and Drug Administration in 1984 and, with Tom Harkin, the first broad-reaching regulation of dietary supplements a decade later. But working with Kennedy has brought Hatch to new heights on liberal health care legislation. In 1995, Hatch took on Jesse Helms in a Kennedy-led effort to provide emergency AIDS funding, breaking a political impasse and ushering in enough Republicans to pass the bill. Two years later, Kennedy wooed Hatch to support a children's health insurance bill that covered the working poor through a cigarette tax—at times literally serenading him in the Senate halls with music. Hatch was won over, explaining at the time that he supported the legislation to prove that the Republican Party "does not hate children."

Nevertheless, Hatch's underlying conservatism on health care has not, by and large, been affected by his friendship with Kennedy, and he has regularly blasted more ambitious expansions of government-run health programs. In 1994, for example, when Kennedy introduced a health care bill modeled on the president's proposal for universal coverage, Hatch attacked it as "nothing more than a pasteurized version of Clinton's blueprint for socialized medicine." Given this, and given Hatch's powerful spot as one of the few Republicans on both the Finance and the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions committees—the bodies with key jurisdiction over health care—Democrats in the current Senate feared that Hatch would be less than enthusiastic about passing comprehensive reform, watching him blast Obama's stimulus as a "Trojan Horse" for socialized health care and vote against the reauthorization of his own children's health act. "We were worried," admits a senior health care policy adviser to Baucus, describing the concerns over the SCHIP vote.

How far will Orrin Hatch go for his buddy Ted Kennedy? The U.S. health care system awaits the answer.

ANTHONY RUSSO, SCOTT J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY/NEWSCOM

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But Kennedy's terminal brain cancer seems to have changed everything. If Hatch's deep-abiding affection for Kennedy has plunged him into the most ambitious legislative deals of his career, the prospect that universal health care will be Kennedy's last defining act in Congress has pushed Hatch into the fray with a far more urgent zeal. Hatch has now become actively involved in the initial deliberations—despite his recent friction with Democratic legislators. "I resented the way [the Democrats] modified CHIP … but, as important as CHIP is, this is even more important," Hatch told me. "I'm prepared to work on a final bill right now." To the relief of Democratic policymakers, Hatch has not only put aside his anger about SCHIP, but also suggested that he wants to take a central role in crafting a grand compromise, setting his sights on achieving "seventy-five or eighty votes" in the Senate. And he's doing it all for Teddy: These days, when Hatch confers with his colleagues, Kennedy's name has become something of a mantra. "The one thing that comes to mind is how many times [Hatch] talks with great affection about Senator Kennedy," says Senator Ron Wyden. "He very much wants to make this journey to health care reform with Senator Kennedy."

Determined to help put a deal together, Hatch has made an all-out push to consult not only Republican-friendly stakeholders, but also Democrats and liberal policy advisers. "Frequently, it's us trying to reach out to them, and [Hatch's staff] took the first step," said the Baucus aide. "We reached out to many people, and I suddenly heard that Hatch's office wanted to talk," says Len Nichols, a former Clinton health reform staffer and key Democratic proponent of the bipartisan reform effort. "They weren't going to give me an hour unless they were really serious."

But Hatch's key role in the push for health care reform could actually involve members of his own party. Hatch isn't the only congressional Republican interested in making some compromises on health care. Senator Chuck Grassley, well known for being a reform-minded crusader, is considering writing a comprehensive bill with Baucus. And Hatch's colleague from Utah, Senator Bob Bennett, has helped convince a handful of Republican senators to co-sponsor the Wyden-Bennett bill, a bold proposal to eliminate the current employer-based insurance system. Nonetheless, within the GOP's pro-reform camp, Hatch is one of the loudest public voices against "Socialized Health Care," which does wonders for his credibility—and the credibility of those Republicans working with him. With Hatch's reputation as a conservative intact, "Grassley has cover—he's not out there by himself doing health reform," says the Democratic Hill staffer. While it won't be enough to sway his most reactionary colleagues, Hatch could bring along a critical margin of Republican support in a legislative fight that might come down to a handful of Senate votes.

It's a particularly senatorial way to pay tribute to a dying friend. And this could be Hatch's last chance to do so, since he may himself be leaving the Senate after his current term ends, depending on his own health. Just enough time for one last serenade.

Suzy Khimm

Check It

Union-loving free traders unite!

The proposed Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which passed the House on March 1, 2007, but was blocked by a Republican filibuster in the Senate, has now been reintroduced and still faces opponents in many quarters. Several economists and business groups deplore its promotion of a "card check" system, which would enable a simple majority of workers to sign up for a union and so avoid the subsequent holding of a secret-ballot election (under Section 2 of the act). These opponents deride the use of the phrase "free choice" in legislation that they see as denying it. And it is, indeed, hard to defend the denial of an automatic secret ballot.

But while these issues will doubtless be debated, and the actual legislation will go through the usual legislative mauling and modification, the current debate misses the essential reason why EFCA makes sense, a reason that has led a stout defender of free trade such as myself to endorse it. The proposal is an appropriate and free-trade-compatible approach to dealing with the overriding problem we face: the long-standing stagnation of workers' real wages.

There are two ways of understanding the stagnation of workers' wages in the United States. (This problem is distinct from the separate issues of "relative" inequality within the wage structure, which has reflected a high and rising "skill premium" for skilled workers; and the more drastic inequality between the incomes of the wealthy and everyone else.) One view, long embraced by the AFL-CIO and now imposed by them on the Democrats elected to the new Congress, is that the stagnation of our workers' wages is to be attributed to our trade with poor countries. In short, the idea is that trade with poor countries produces paupers in rich countries.

This fear of trade with poor countries is wrong in its premises. There is, currently, no compelling evidence that such trade is driving our real wages down. This is the conclusion reached by several empirical analysts, including Robert Feenstra, who heads the international trade program at the prestigious and non-ideological National Bureau of Economic Research. If anything, my early work, developed further in my book *In Defense of Globalization*, as well as the recent findings of Harvard's Robert Lawrence, argues the opposite: The downward pressure on wages from other domestic factors such as acute and continuous technical change has been *moderated* by trade with the poor countries.

But the consequence of the AFL-CIO's mistaken fear is that the federation has pushed actively for the strategy of moderating competition from poor countries, specifically by insisting that their labor standards should be the same as ours. It's a strategy we economists call "export protectionism"—reducing trade by asking the exporting countries to take actions that would restrain their exports. This strategy has worked politically with liberals in the United States because it enables the unions to present and press their demands, which in fact issue from self-interest, as being prompted by altruism and sympathy for foreign workers instead. But developing countries recognize this disguised protectionism; Brazil and India, both democracies with robust labor unions, have rejected the insertion of labor standards into trade treaties.

Whereas the AFL-CIO explanation of wage stagnation essentially *externalizes* the issue, scapegoating poorer countries as the cause of our problems, a rival explanation favored by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—which, led by Andy Stern, split from the AFL-CIO in 2005 and created a new labor coalition, taking 40 percent of the membership with it—has been to focus instead on a *domestic* institutional explanation for the stagnation. Some domestic factors putting a downward pressure on wages are obvious, like labor-saving technical changes apparent to the naked eye. Semi-skilled secretaries have been replaced by personal computers; assembly lines still

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exist, but the Charlie Chaplins have been replaced by skilled technicians working in a glass cage above, managing the mechanized assembly lines. But SEIU, like many labor economists, focuses on other institutional factors that have depressed wages. This camp points out that union membership in the United States has fallen, from 23.3 percent of the labor force in 1983 to 14.3 percent in 2003, and fallen by half in the private sector over a longer period, to as low as 9 percent; that these drops are largely attributable to the legislated obstacles to union organization; and, finally, that falling membership has put a lid on the ability to raise wages.

The ability to organize has been affected, for instance, by the Taft-Hartley legislation more than half a century ago, which has handicapped the ability to strike by making it easier to hire replacement workers and making it more difficult to stage sympathetic strikes. A union without effective ability to strike is a paper tiger. Legislative changes that would facilitate increased membership of the unions therefore have a claim on our attention.

There is much evidence that increased membership helps raise wages. True, much of the empirical work by Harvard's Richard Freeman and other labor economists shows that unions manage to reduce the ratio of top wages to the bottom wages. But there is some evidence that this is done not just by reducing the highest wages but also by increasing the lowest wages. Increased membership also increases the political clout of the unions and, in turn, leads to support for raising the minimum wage, which liberal labor economists are convinced helps the lowest wages overall (though this issue does remain a source of animated controversy among liberal and conservative labor economists).

What is indisputable, however, is that the AFL-CIO explanation of the problem of stagnant wages commands little scientific support, and its proposed solution leads to protectionism. By contrast, the rival explanation, led at the time of the split of the AFL-CIO membership by SEIU, has substantial scientific support and leads to domestic institutional reform, however imperfectly embodied in the Employee Free Choice Act, so recently and publicly supported by dozens of economists, including myself, in *The Washington Post*. The choice for President Obama, as he seeks to seize the Roosevelt moment, seems clear. JAGDISH BHAGWATI

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The Lesser-Known Think Tanks of Washington

Council for Innovative Alliance

A liberal, international-minded body dedicated to matching countries that have no political disputes or shared interests but just might get along. Recent successes include the burgeoning alliance of Estonia and Benin, as well as a promising Facebook exchange between Cyprus and Mongolia. Downplayed is the infamous Austro-Guyanese bitchfest and a disastrous summit at which The Maldives failed to "get" Moldova's sarcasm. Riots flared across the Indian Ocean, prompting Moldova to scramble its air force—which, at the time, consisted of several refurbished kites and an enormous Garfield balloon on loan from Macy's.

Middle Eastern Equivocation Center

Independently financed and fiercely ambiguous, MEEC has for 30 years offered sophisticated socio-political analysis of the Middle East without once advocating a position; steadfastly adhering to the credo "*Videamus Quomodo Eveniet*," or, "Let's see how things shake out." It is believed that, in the early 1990s, the group considered publishing an article in support of the State Department's choice of hotel for the final negotiations of the Oslo Accords, but the piece was ultimately dropped in favor of a less divisive monograph titled "The Majestic Camel." (*Foreign Affairs*, vol. 77, issue #3, April 1993.)

Heritage Foundation RAW

The new home for policy recommendations too crazy conservative for the Heritage Foundation. Rejecting the sissified scholarship of "Red" Roger Ailes and "Comrade Kristol," Heritage RAW's all-white, all-decrepit roster advances an outlandishly reactionary platform in rooms so smoke-filled it is said that members can only identify each other by their hacking coughs. At a recent meat-and-potatoes breakfast meeting, resident scholars discussed abolishing the minimum wage in favor of a "suggested donation," erecting a 700-mile fence to secure the U.S.-California border, and a visionary plan to privatize the House of Representatives.

Def Jam Think Tank

Dr. Dre meets Dr. Kissinger, Kanye meets Condi, and Wu-Tang meets respected political analyst Norman Ornstein in Russell Simmons's latest foray into policy development. Platinum-laden scholars compete for Hill cred in highly profane freestyle policy battles amid strobe lights, thundering beats, and sweat-soaked interns, followed by an informal bag lunch. Although the Def Jam format has yet to generate any policy ideas that could be regarded as "serious," or "intelligible," the institute is widely credited for introducing the adjective "weezy" to Beltway parlance, as well as the sudden fascination with hydraulics at the Brookings Institution.

The Chicago Bears

Credited with developing the framework for countless pieces of congressional legislation, including the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, No Child Left Behind, and key passages of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance bill. Strong personal relationships on both sides of the aisle have purchased considerable legislative influence for an outside-the-Beltway organization. They finished in second place in the NFC North, with a record of 9–7. —YONI BRENNER

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Stayin' Alive

The inside story of health care reform's near-death experience.

JONATHAN COHN

In early January, most of Barack Obama's senior staff assembled with the president-elect for a meeting inside a windowless, eighth-floor office at the transition headquarters in Washington. It was a pivotal moment in Obama's transformation from candidate to commander-in-chief. Obama's advisers had taken all of his campaign pledges, factored in his promise to reduce the deficit, and put together a provisional blueprint for governing. For the first time, Obama would get a sense of how his proposals fit together in the real world.

Obama sat in the middle of a rectangular table with the budget projections in front of him. He said he was mostly happy with what his advisers had produced. Investments in energy and education, plus real progress on reducing the deficit—it was all in there, Obama noted. But then the president-elect turned to his one major concern: a key item that was not, in his opinion, sufficiently funded. "Here's my guidance to you," one participant recalls Obama saying to the group. "Protect health care."

It wasn't the first time that health care had seemed to get short shrift from Obama's advisers. Nor would it be the last. Indeed, there were moments during the transition and the early weeks of the administration when it appeared that the push for comprehensive health care reform might collapse before it had even begun. During this time, a debate raged inside the administration, with some senior officials arguing that the new president should wade into health care gingerly—or even postpone it altogether—because it would cost too much, distract from other priorities, and carry huge political risks.

Ultimately, however, these arguments failed to carry the day, and health care reform, against what occasionally seemed like long odds, managed to find a sizeable place in Obama's budget. The story of how that happened—as conveyed in interviews with more than a dozen administration insiders representing a wide variety of viewpoints—provides a window onto the political and personal dynamics that dominate the new White House. It also offers insights, some of them surprising, into the management style of the president himself.

The divide among Obama's counselors was never over whether to pursue health care reform or even what it should look like in the end. Pretty much every top official serving in the administration believed that health care reform was a worthwhile project—and that the goal should be to give everybody insurance while making steady progress on reducing the cost of medical care. What divided Obama's team was the question of how to pursue reform—in particular, how quickly.

That tension stretched back to the campaign, when Obama's political strategists advised him to soft-pedal the topic. One of them was David Axelrod. Although personally acquainted with the flaws in our health care system because of his disabled daughter, he also understood public opinion: The middle-class voters whose support politicians covet were worried about the cost of insurance, but their enthusiasm for universal coverage seemed shallow. Obama, though, always insisted on keeping health care prominent in the election. "He said, 'I want to do health care as president,'" one senior adviser paraphrased, "'and I can't do health care if I don't talk about it during the campaign.'"

The commitment was not just rhetorical. Behind the scenes, Obama had told former senator Tom Daschle to prepare for a prominent role in shaping his health care agenda. Daschle began reaching out to various players in the debate, in order to lay the groundwork for a legislative push in 2009. Shortly after the election, Obama formally tapped Daschle to become both secretary of Health and Human Services and head of the newly created White House Office of Health Reform. During a December meeting in Chicago, Obama affirmed his interest in moving forward on the health care plan he'd touted during the campaign.But, while Daschle shared that goal, others had doubts. Axelrod's anxiety hadn't dissipated since the election. And now he had a new ally in Larry Summers, whom Obama had appointed to head the National Economic Council. One concern for Summers was the diversion of presidential and staff attention from other issues, like the economy. Mostly, though, Summers worried about money. Experts generally believe it will take years before better use of information technology, more preventive care, and other reforms start to yield serious savings. At least in the short run, health care reform is therefore likely to add to the government's financial burden—during a time of rising deficits. This made Summers uncomfortable.

Peter Orszag, director of the Office of Management and Budget, was more openly enthusiastic about pursuing reform. Health care had become an obsession for Orszag in his previous job as head of the Congressional Budget Office. Via speeches, op-eds, and, most famously, his own blog, he never missed an opportunity to tell people that the country faced a long-term fiscal crisis—not so much because of Social Security, as was commonly assumed, but primarily because of Medicare and Medicaid. The most sensible way to get a handle on those programs, Orszag said, was to get a handle on all medical costs, public and private—something best done in the context of a sweeping reform that also extended coverage to all Americans.

Still, Orszag shared Summers's growing worries about the deficit—and wondered, in addition, whether too much deficit spending would alienate moderates on Capitol Hill. As a result, he urged that any health care reform pay for itself, or at least come as close as possible. The trouble was, finding that revenue within the health care system meant raising taxes on insurance or services, or enacting substantial cuts to Medicare and Medicaid—moves sure to spark intense political opposition. (Another key player with similarly complex views was Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, a deficit hawk who also backed ambitious moves on health care.)

It was amid these conditions that the debate over the budget got underway. A series of formal and informal discussions unfolded in the White House and outside it, and Obama was not present for all of them. Particularly in Obama's absence, the voices of the skeptics often predominated. "It was scaring the hell

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out of the rest of us," says one of the advisers who favored more aggressive action.

And health care, in the end, might have gotten pushed aside—except that one very senior official in the administration kept insisting that it stay on the agenda. That official was Obama himself. Repeatedly, the president made clear that he was not abandoning health care reform. There was the meeting in early January where he expressed disappointment with the budget numbers his advisers were showing him. And there was the Sunday after the inauguration, when Daschle found himself in the White House to meet with Rahm Emanuel. Daschle had requested the get-together in order to clarify the president's intentions on health care. During the meeting, which took place in Emanuel's office, Obama himself stopped by and reiterated to Daschle what he'd been saying in public: He was doing health care this year.

Increasingly, the debate was zeroing in on a specific question: How much money should the administration devote to health care in its budget proposal? This was related to, but not necessarily synonymous with, the question of whether to attempt health care reform in the immediate future. Some advisers who wanted to move ahead quickly with reform still felt that it was a strategic mistake to broadcast this intention so brazenly in the budget; better, they argued, to deal with the funding details later in the year. Others thought it essential to include substantial money for health care in the budget, in order to send a signal to Capitol Hill and interest groups, particularly conservative ones that had expressed qualified support for reform but would bolt the second it seemed the president had stopped focusing on the subject.

At this point in the debate, Daschle's situation became a complicating factor. The former senator was already struggling to assert himself because he had been spending a lot of time out of town in order to be at the bedside of his ailing brother. But now the controversy over his late tax payments began to distract him and his staff; eventually, he was forced to withdraw from the administration altogether. In the immediate aftermath, it wasn't clear who would speak for the Office of Health Reform—or whether the Office of Health Reform would even exist.

The conversation about whether and how to fund health care in the budget went around and around, with the president himself frequently expressing exasperation at the difficulty of putting together an intellectually honest proposal that was also politically viable. (A photo on the White House website, in which Obama is leaning back in his chair, looking up toward the ceiling with apparent frustration, comes from one of those meetings.) "There was no aspect of the budget that the president spent more time discussing," says one senior adviser, noting that it was the primary topic in four of the seven budget deliberations that Obama personally attended.

But, whether officials convened with the president in the Roosevelt Room or gathered without him in Orszag's office, the consensus among them seemed to be moving away from a large, showy investment in health care reform. At one meeting late in the process, Obama asked his advisers which ones believed it made sense to include health care in the budget. Only one person raised a hand: Mark Childress, who had been Daschle's chief of staff and had assumed the duties of speaking for the health team after Daschle left.

One trademark of Obama's management of these meetings was to encourage dissenters. This instance would be no different. Obama asked Childress to make his case—to "channel" Daschle, as the president put it. Childress obliged, suggesting that a failure to include health care in the budget was tantamount to conceding it as an issue for the next two years. Obama nodded along—although, just like in previous sessions, the meeting broke up without a decision.

By the end, the debate had coalesced around three options: investing around $1 trillion over ten years, offset by new revenue and some substantial reductions in Medicare and Medicaid spending; investing a slightly lower amount, in the neighborhood of $600 billion, which could be offset by more modest revenue increases and reductions in Medicare and Medicaid; or putting aside just $300 billion, offset mostly by changes to Medicare and Medicaid. A final decision wasn't made until Friday, February 13, as a deadline for setting the budget loomed. Rejecting the $1 trillion proposal, because the offsets it required seemed too severe, Obama went with the $600 billion option—$634 billion, to be precise. The sum wasn't enough to finance universal coverage; an actual package could cost $1 trillion, if not more, according to many estimates. But Obama decided simply to note that fact and promise to work with Congress on finding the extra money—in a nod to the fiscal concerns of Orszag and Summers. Strategically speaking, this approach was consistent with the widely accepted lesson of the health care battle of 1994—that the Clinton White House should have let Congress take more ownership over the process.

Even after the budget proposal was set in type—literally, since it had to be run through the Government Printing Office—one issue remained: the language in Obama's late February address to Congress. An early draft of the speech stated that Obama would seek health care reform "this year," which later became a phrase about not permitting "another year" to go by without health care reform. A subsequent draft contained a tiny but significant tweak: "another year" had somehow become "another presidential term." It's not clear who made the change or why, but, after some phone calls and messages, the words "another year" were restored.

Was all this the right decision? Only time will tell. As pleased as it has left advocates of health care reform—this writer included—there were defensible arguments for every option Obama's advisers presented. At a time when the economy is collapsing, perhaps Obama can't afford the distraction of such a major policy effort; at a time when the government is pumping out so much money for other priorities, perhaps it's foolish to incur a new obligation that, if carried out by the book, still may not pay for itself in under ten years. And, even if it makes sense to seek health care reform this year, Obama's decision to allocate health care money now could make the budget tougher to pass—inviting an extra political fight that might make reform even harder to achieve.

Whatever the fate of health care reform, though, the debate does tell us something about the way Obama plans to manage his presidency. Obama has long struck many observers as an extremely cautious politician, and his handling of the banking crisis and the economic stimulus bill has tended to reinforce that perception. The trajectory of the health care debate inside his administration, however, suggests that Obama is not always as cautious as he might seem. He can think big. He can take risks. And he can bring his advisers to him—rather than the other way around. ◆

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Free Larry Summers

Why the White House needs to unshackle its economic oracle.

NOAM SCHEIBER

On a typical day, Larry Summers, the top White House economic adviser, sits in his office overlooking the Rose Garden and receives a near-endless succession of aides working on a stunning variety of issues. In a single, several-hour bloc, Summers might have meetings on housing, the auto industry, health care, technology policy, and the financial crisis, all of which he's exploring in subatomic detail. Summers is said to be fascinated with such off-the-beaten-path topics as the switch to digital television—he insists on understanding the physics behind the technology.

This image of Summers weighing bit rates and digital compression was somewhat daunting as I prepared to visit him on a recent Monday afternoon. All the more because Summers is known not just for his intellect, but for a bluntness that was legendary in his years as a Harvard professor. One former student recalls trying to explain his progress on a paper only to have Summers interrupt with: "So you're nowhere, right?" For days, I'd worried that Summers would dress me down like a frivolous undergraduate if I ventured something moronic.

It turns out I was hardly alone in this. Since the fall, when Barack Obama appointed Summers to head his National Economic Council (NEC), capital denizens have presumed the president's economic program will rise and fall on Summers's temperament, which some feared could undermine the administration's effectiveness. "Even Mr. Summers's allies," *The New York Times* wrote in December, wonder if he can "nurtur[e] the proposals of others." Much of the concern revolved around Summers's difficult tenure as president of Harvard, which ended amid controversy over his impolitic remarks about women.

When Summers trooped out to greet me, his shirt was still tucked in, but his pants had sagged several inches below their natural resting place. It gave him a vaguely grunge look—that is, if Nirvana fans preferred sleek brown slacks and salmon-colored ties. Summers eagerly shook my hand, then led me back to his wood-paneled office. Inside, he sank into an oversized yellow armchair. He is slightly below average in height, but with a head out of proportion to the rest of his body. The longer we spoke, the more the chair seemed to swallow him up, until only the head remained. At a certain point I couldn't shake the impression it was just me and Summers's brain.

As at Harvard, Summers functions on exceedingly little sleep. (A former student told me Summers once praised his dedication after noticing he'd run a computation at 4 a.m.; the student didn't have the heart to tell him he'd queued it up at six the night before.) To power through the day, Summers relies on a punishing Diet Coke regimen. The combination of fatigue and extreme caffeine intake can produce the occasional verbal and physical tic: Summers is a chronic foot-tapper and sometimes turns over words and clauses like an engine that won't start.

Still, it was the contrast with Summers's graceless image that was most striking. On some level what I wanted from Summers was reassurance about the economy, and he seemed happy to oblige. When I asked about the differences between our current crisis and the Japanese "lost decade" of the 1990s, Summers soothingly explained that the Fed and the Obama administration had intervened much earlier and more aggressively than their Japanese counterparts, and that our bubble wasn't nearly as inflated. History suggests that "recovery doesn't come quickly and that the ultimate fiscal cost is high," he said, "but I don't think we are looking at the same set of challenges as Japan." When I wondered what steps he would take if there were no checks on his decision-making, Summers was deferential. "I think the right approach here is the president's approach," he cooed.

I'd gotten what I'd hoped for, in other words. Not a battering-ram but a warm, avuncular presence. Others have noticed this change, too. "Mindful of his reputation as an intellectual bulldozer, Mr. Summers is working hard to rein himself in," the *Times* followed-up in February. *Newsweek* recently found "signs that Summers really is learning to play well with others." And yet, once our interview was over, I felt strangely unfulfilled. Like I'd shown up for a deep-tissue massage, only to be rubbed down gently with pleasant-smelling oils. Without the pain and abrasiveness, how do you know it's really working?

At which point I began to worry: What if we in the press have gotten it wrong? Collegiality is all well and good. But, in this moment of global crisis, when indecision could be disastrous and a wrong decision even worse, shouldn't we *want* to unleash our hard-charging geniuses and get out of their way? Maybe the issue isn't whether Summers plays well with others, but whether Obama's economic effort should be led by a an ensemble cast or a single virtuoso performer.

Personality aside, Summers has long been associated with a certain tactical and strategic brashness. "I'm somebody who wants their errors to be of trying to do too much rather than trying to do too little," he told *Portfolio* magazine last September. One early outlet for this instinct was the college debate circuit, which Summers joined while an undergrad at MIT. Policy debate was a labor-intensive activity. The best college programs—Georgetown, Northwestern, Harvard—had professional coaches and up to two dozen debaters. The teams would spend hundreds of man-hours in the library each week researching proposals they would defend in tournaments. (The national-championship-winning proposal in 1974: a cap-and-trade program for limiting sulfur-dioxide emissions.) MIT was, by comparison, a relatively small

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program with only intermittent coaching. Unlike their rivals at other schools, who could take less demanding classes, the students' course loads often limited their prep time. Nonetheless, Summers was able to make himself into a top-flight debater.

Summers was known in debate circles for two qualities. The first was his unusual pace. Elite debaters in those days spoke at dizzying speeds so as to cram as many arguments and data points as possible into their allotted time. To the untrained ear, a matchup between top debaters would be an incomprehensible hum of varying pitches. But Summers spoke about 25 percent slower than most of his rivals. "He was not a speed king," says Tom Rollins, a friend and debate contemporary. This left Summers at a critical disadvantage, since, according to the rules, an unanswered argument is a conceded argument. It also elevated the importance of the second feature of Summers's debating style: a tactical sophistication that often allowed him to overcome his deficit of verbiage.

In one semi-famous episode, Summers and a partner appeared in the final round of a tournament at the University of Redlands. As usual at this stage of a competition, Summers was overmatched speed-wise—the opposing team had put forth several arguments in support of a plan to feed the starving masses. "Larry obviously saw that, if the round was judged conventionally, it would have been a wholesale slaughter," recalls Greg Rosenbaum, a friend who was in attendance. So, rather than rebut each argument, Summers simply ignored them. Instead, he alleged that they all relied on a key misinterpretation of an academic article, thereby collapsing the debate to a single question. Summers was, in effect, challenging the entire case against world hunger on a technicality. Amazingly, it half-worked. "The judges came to the conclusion that Larry was right, there was only one argument," recalls Rosenbaum. "They just happened to conclude he lost that one."

Summers's audacity succeeded more often than not. He was, for example, a feared practitioner of the so-called "business confidence disadvantage," or "biz con." The idea was to show that the other team's proposals were so radical they would send panic through the stock market and trigger an economic collapse. "He would force the debate onto his terms," says John Graham, another debate contemporary. One minute a debater would be arguing for a minimum wage or consumer-product regulation; the next, Summers would make him answer for a second Great Depression.

During his senior year of college, Summers was considering graduate school in both theoretical physics and economics. For weeks, he anguished over whether to pursue his passion (physics) or the family business (in addition to his economist parents, Summers has two uncles—Paul Samuelson and Kenneth Arrow—who won Nobel prizes in the field). After he finally decided on the latter, he explained his thinking to Rollins: "What does a bad theoretical physicist do for a living? He walks into an office, sits at a desk, and stares at a plain white sheet of paper." "But," Summers added, "there's a lot of work in the world for a bad economist."

Summers, of course, would go on to be one of the top economists of his generation. Several of the papers he wrote as a Harvard graduate student redefined whole swaths of the discipline, and they remain influential to this day. Summers would accept an assistant professorship at MIT long before submitting his dissertation and, three years later, win a tenured position back at Harvard. (At 28, he was among the youngest ever to achieve that status at the university.)

If Summers had one fault as a debater, it's that he was sometimes *too* unorthodox. "There were times I tried to convince him he should debate a little more from conventional wisdom," recalls Dallas Perkins, who coached Summers his senior year. But what was a weakness in the insular world of college debate drove Summers's success as a scholar. One paper he wrote as a grad student overturned economists' long-standing belief that the social costs of unemployment were low. The assumption had been that most people are out of work only briefly; Summers and a colleague found that a significant number went without work for long periods of time.

Other Summers papers chipped away at the idea that stock markets are efficient (that is, that prices move in response to real-world developments rather than investor psychology) and at the concept of "Ricardian equivalence." The conceit was that, under certain circumstances, cutting taxes or raising government benefits has little effect on people's spending habits. Because parents know their kids will eventually face higher taxes to close the deficit, they save the additional income and pass it down. Summers thought the idea was a stretch—that parents were far more greedy and self-serving than many economists assumed. He helped design a study showing that parents don't bequeath wealth to their kids for altruistic reasons; they bequeath it as a way to manipulate them into visiting more often.

When Summers took issue with a colleague's work, he would strafe them with questions from a seat in a seminar room, a style not uncommon in economics. "Isn't it obvious that the assumption on which your whole analysis rests is unrealistic?" he once demanded, in the presence of a *Boston Globe* reporter. And yet, for all his apparent gruffness, Summers's interaction with students had undeniable warmth. At any given moment, there might be a handful of students waiting outside his office. Some didn't even attend Harvard. An adviser at MIT or Yale had given up on their project and, in a final act of desperation, sent them to the young oracle on Massachusetts Avenue. Summers would briefly inspect the student's work, then start spewing ideas while the supplicant scribbled frenetically. "He'd say, 'Here's why what you're thinking is wrong. Here's what you should think instead,'" recalls MIT's Jonathan Gruber. The people on the receiving end are now some of the most prominent economists in the world. But many still credit Summers for the fact that they have a Ph.D. "Larry was basically the inspiration for [my dissertation]," says Gruber. "I was floundering."

Even as a young professor, Summers would attempt to restrain his own worst impulses, sometimes in poignantly ham-handed ways. Alan Krueger, an economics professor at Princeton, once earned a rare A-plus on Summers's public-finance exam. (After Krueger and I spoke, the administration nominated him to be assistant Treasury secretary for economic policy.) When Krueger got the test back, he noticed that Summers had written him a note. "You've clearly mastered the material," it said. "I'd be interested in having you work for me." But the words "having you work for me" had been crossed out. In their place, Summers had written "working with you on a paper this summer."

In truth, Summers had an ulterior motive for courting so many students. Perhaps ironically for someone so worried about stock-market bubbles, his research style could best be described as "highly leveraged." That is, Summers was most comfortable thinking up big ideas, then partnering with capable students and colleagues to execute them. Among other things, this methodology helped him publish more than 100 academic papers in roughly

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15 years—an output that exceeds the entire life's work of many lesser economists. (More than one Summers protégé joked to me about initially being flattered by his invitations, then learning, as one put it, that "Larry will work with anybody.")

By the late 1980s, Summers was brushing up against the limits of his ability to leverage himself. Jonathan Gruber recalls co-writing a paper not long after that came back from a journal with a number of proposed revisions. Many of the points were just wrong, prompting Summers to tell the editor, "Now I understand why guys of a certain age stop sending stuff to journals. It's annoying when people who don't know what they're talking about decide on whether your paper should get published." To get his ideas out, Summers still had to deal with all manner of scholarly bureaucracy—what Gruber calls "the stuff of life"—and it was beginning to create a bottleneck.

Around the same time, Summers made his first foray into politics. In the late '80s, an acquaintance introduced him to Robert Rubin, then a top executive at Goldman Sachs and a major Democratic donor. Rubin eventually helped pull Summers into the Dukakis campaign as an unpaid economic adviser.

Summers was a well-intentioned flop. He sometimes pushed the kind of proposals academic economists love—say, raising gasoline taxes or eliminating the minimum wage for teenagers—and which drive political hands batty. But the experience did, for the first time, cast his worldview in a more overtly political light. At the broadest level, Summers was a moderate liberal: deferential to markets when feasible (as in international trade), but convinced they fail with some regularity (hence his foray into behavioral finance). He believed the government should provide opportunity (especially educational) to those who lack it, in addition to cushioning the business cycle. Over the long term, he felt, a country's budget should balance and take up a modest, stable percentage of GDP.

Years later, the left would deride Summers as a crypto-conservative in part because of his coolness toward regulation during the go-go '90s. But this imputes far more ideology to Summers than he actually has. Unlike his friend Alan Greenspan, whose faith in markets has been near-theological, the source of Summers's hesitation was practical and intellectual. Summers believed financial market innovation was creating vast new efficiencies. He was fond of comparing it to the arrival of the jet engine, which spurred economic growth but made the inevitable crash much deadlier. The solution, he told *The New Yorker*'s John Cassidy, was to lengthen runways, not limit travel. The elegance of such analogies clearly led him astray. (Summers jettisoned his earlier skepticism as the breadth of regulatory failure became apparent in recent years.)

Summers was living in Washington for a stint as the World Bank's chief economist when Bill Clinton ran for president in 1992. After Clinton won, Summers opted to place himself in consideration for a top economic job rather than return to Harvard in 1993. As Gruber puts it, a policy job was the perfect solution to Summers's bottleneck problem. In the academy, students were too inexperienced to flesh out the finer details of his papers, while colleagues would have been insulted by the suggestion. But, in Washington, you could give a staffer an assignment and ask them to report back in six months. Not only were they being paid to do it—they would be delighted by the attention.

In the end, Summers left the academy for the same reason he decided not to pursue theoretical physics: because he wanted his ideas to have broad reach. Another former student recalls Summers once telling him he'd consider a paper they were writing a success if it inspired 100 other economists to work on the same topic. The student had never heard someone so ambitious about influencing the profession.

PHOTO BY RICHARD HOWARD/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES; PETER MARLOW/MAGNUM PHOTOS; TRIPPETT/SIPA

Summers initially had his heart set on becoming chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA)—the White House's in-house think tank—like his mentor Martin Feldstein. (Feldstein had held the position under Reagan.) But liberal opponents torpedoed his chances by releasing a memo he'd signed during his World Bank days. The document, a provocative thought experiment about environmental policy, earned Summers the ire of Vice President Al Gore, who blocked his ascension to the post. (Thereafter, recalls one White House aide from the early '90s, "[Summers] would avoid the vice president like the plague. At meetings together, he would keep quiet.") Instead, Summers found himself at Treasury as undersecretary for international affairs.

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Early on, Summers's political skills were raw. His unfailing directness, endearing to many in Cambridge, could be downright jarring in Washington. Bill Barreda, then a senior official on Treasury's international side, recalls preparing a memo for the new undersecretary. Summers began reading it in his presence, and, before finishing, opined: "You really like [topic] sentences." When testifying before Congress, Summers often wore a pained expression, as if somehow surprised by the quality of the questioning. In 1997, Summers famously complained to reporters that the evidence behind the GOP's argument for repealing the estate tax was "about as bad as it gets." "When it comes to the estate tax," he added unhelpfully, "there is no case other than selfishness."

And yet, whatever his liabilities, Summers was highly effective from the getgo. In December of 1994, the Mexican finance ministry alerted Summers's assistant secretary, Jeff Shafer, that the country was nearing a currency crisis. During the early '90s, Mexico had started down two paths that, together, proved unsustainable. First, the country ran large trade deficits. To pay for all the goods it was importing, Mexico needed dollars, which meant it had to sell government bonds. This led to the second problem: To appease all the foreign investors who worried the peso would lose value, Mexico issued certain short-term bonds—called "Tesobonos"—that were linked to the dollar.

This worked fine for a while. Foreign money flooded in as investors snatched up the Tesobonos. But, as the years passed, creditors began doubting that the government would pay off its bonds at the fixed exchange rate. Many began withdrawing their money, forcing the Mexicans to redeem the bonds for dollars. By the time Treasury tuned in, in late 1994, the dollars had almost run out and the government could no longer defend the peso-dollar exchange rate. The imminent decline of the peso would make Mexico's foreign debt more expensive and raise the risk of a default.

Worse, Treasury itself was in limbo. Then-Secretary Lloyd Bentsen had announced his retirement, but Bob Rubin, his successor, had yet to replace him. It fell to Summers—whose team included Shafer and a young deputy assistant secretary named Tim Geithner—to figure out the consequences of a Mexican collapse. By January 10, 1995, the Summers group had a tentative answer: The fallout could be several hundred thousand U.S. jobs and a 30 percent spike in illegal immigration. If Mexico infected other emerging markets, it could wind up shaving a point off U.S. GDP growth.

That same day, Summers accompanied Rubin to his Oval Office swearing in. Once President Clinton administered the oath, Rubin recalls in his memoir, the new Treasury secretary turned to the president and urged a massive loan package. He then gave the floor to Summers, who briefed the president and concluded that something on the order of $25 billion would be necessary. *Surely he meant twenty-five million*, George Stephanopoulos interjected. No, Summers said, "billion with a 'B.'" Clinton swallowed hard and, after weighing every angle, signed on.

The initial response from congressional leaders was also favorable. But the rank and file was hostile. Vermont's then-congressman, the socialist Bernie Sanders, told Rubin to "go back to your Wall Street friends [and] tell them to take the risk and not ask the American taxpayers." A freshman Republican named Steve Stockman accused Rubin of arranging a bailout to protect the investments he'd made while a partner at Goldman Sachs. Soon, even the once-supportive leaders were either quietly backtracking (Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole) or railing against the package outright (Banking Committee Chairman Alfonse D'Amato). It was what *High Noon* might have looked like if Gary Cooper had played a policy wonk.

As it became obvious that cooperation from Congress wouldn't be forthcoming, Rubin and Summers began to consider plan B. Back in 1934, Congress had given Treasury a pool of money called the "Exchange Stabilization Fund" (or ESF) to help smooth out exchange rates. Sixty years later, the fund stood at about $35 billion, and Treasury lawyers believed they had the authority to draw on it. And so, on January 30, with no congressional help in sight, Summers, Rubin, and Clinton's top White House aides decided to tap the ESF to the tune of $20 billion.

Still, even this amount was unlikely to restore confidence in Mexico. The only other source of money was the International Monetary Fund, and here's where Summers's occasional bullying actually served him (and the country) well. To help cajole what eventually became a

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$17.8 billion contribution out of managing director Michel Camdessus, Summers pushed and prodded relentlessly. "I remember late the night that this unfolded, in the early morning, Larry was in an adjoining office in rather strong terms telling the IMF they had to step up to the table here in a major way," recalls one former colleague.

By early March, the first U.S. installment of the nearly $40 billion package was flowing. By mid-May, there were signs it was working. By early '97, the Mexican government had completely paid off the loan—three years ahead of schedule.

When Summers emerged as a leading candidate to be Obama's Treasury secretary, the biggest obstacles were lingering questions from his searing experience at Harvard. Summers's remarks about the underrepresentation of women among scientists received most of the headlines. But it was his constant warring with the faculty over an ambitious reform agenda that probably did him in. (His rapport with the students, on the other hand, remained exceptional throughout. Even after he resigned, Summers would stop by pizza parties and dorm gatherings, according to the *Times*.)

As it happens, Summers's problem at Harvard wasn't his lack of political skill per se. It's that he'd misunderstood the kind of institution he was running. Summers had assumed Harvard was a pure meritocracy—where ideas win out on the basis of their strength and little else. His own experience as a professor there had taught him as much. When he proposed, say, revising the undergraduate curriculum to focus more on basic knowledge than on the latest intellectual fashions, he was prepared to defend the logic of the plan, not sweet-talk professors who felt threatened by it. But, as Summers told *ProPublica*'s Paul Steiger early last year, "I just didn't fully appreciate the extent to which the university . . . was a political kind of institution."

In truth, Summers's political aptitude had steadily risen throughout his tenure at Treasury. By the end of the Clinton administration, he'd mostly learned to check his legendary bluntness. He'd even let his playful side out. As a way of bonding with his charges, he once trekked to the Secret Service training facility in Beltsville, Maryland, where he learned to perform the so-called "J-turn"—a 180-degree maneuver at 60 miles per hour. (The Secret Service was one of the many agencies Treasury oversaw at the time, along with Customs and the ATF.)

Nowhere was the progress more evident than his dealings with Congress. The Summers who once rolled his eyes at questions from members was now catering to their every need. Summers traveled to Representative Charlie Stenholm's rural Texas district to talk Social Security reform with local farmers. He visited Representative Jim Kolbe in Arizona to inspect Customs enforcement procedures, a subject close to Kolbe's heart. When the administration asked Congress to re-up its IMF contribution, Summers painstakingly explained the issue to Representative Sonny Callahan of Alabama. "He learned to focus on how to make it very local, very specific to person X, madame Y, congressman Z," says Linda Robertson, a longtime Treasury legislative aide. "[Like] why someone like Sonny Callahan from Mobile, Alabama would care about the IMF being able to utilize some of its gold, replenish its resources—the fact that, okay, he's got manufacturing . . . that translates into exports."

These skills served Summers well when he succeeded Rubin as Treasury secretary in 1999—as they did at the outset of the Obama administration. On December 16, Obama gathered his top advisers in Chicago to set the broad parameters of the stimulus plan. In addition to Summers, chief of staff Rahm Emanuel attended, as did Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, budget director Peter Orszag, environmental czar Carol Browner, and a handful of other senior aides. The early discussions had centered on a measure in the neighborhood of $500 billion over two years, perhaps slightly higher. But, the week after Thanksgiving, Christina Romer, Obama's choice for CEA chair, had produced numbers suggesting the economic deterioration was much worse than expected.

It was Summers who concluded that the bill would have to be larger. "He was very, very focused on the macro impact—job creation, the magnitude of fiscal stimulus in 2009, the magnitude of fiscal stimulus in 2010," recalls one White House aide. The group accepted Summers's recommendation for up to $775 billion—then a very large number with few historical precedents—after four hours of deliberation. No one was bitterly opposed, but several questioned whether a stimulus of that size was truly necessary. Some wondered if it could survive Congress, and if it was even possible to spend so much so quickly. In the end, Summers helped persuade his colleagues that "doing too little poses a greater threat than doing too much," as he later explained in a *Washington Post* op-ed.

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Summers's political touch was even more visible in his dealings with Congress. In early January, he trekked to the Hill to unveil the stimulus plan before the full complement of Senate Democrats. The meeting did not go well. The senators were exercised over Obama's proposed job-creation tax credit, which they said would be a windfall for companies already hiring, and the stinginess of its allocation for energy. "Not to overdramatize it, but he got an earful," recalls one Senate aide. Summers took it all in cheerfully. He pledged to take the senators' ideas back to the White House and, says the aide, remained in "listening mode" throughout. By the time Summers returned a few weeks later, the mood among the senators had lightened considerably. Summers, Emanuel, and White House congressional lobbyist Phil Schiliro had decided to drop the controversial tax provision and add more energy money (after Emanuel got a green light from the president). The Democratic senators were grateful for the responsiveness.

Within the administration, Summers also appears to be something of a political success. He and David Axelrod, Obama's top political adviser, are by all accounts mutual fans—Axelrod is regularly among the aides who prep him for Sunday talk shows. (In an e-mail, Axelrod raves about Summers's ability to talk "about the plight of the middle class, and how most people judge the economy, not by arcane economic formulas, but by how far their paychecks go.") Summers also remains close to Tim Geithner, his one-time special assistant. He spent much of February 10, the day Geithner announced the outlines of his widely panned Financial Stability Plan, on the phone heatedly defending the secretary to any reporter who would listen. (Summers insisted Geithner had been a victim of unfair expectations-setting in the press.)

At first glance, Summers might appear to have less to contribute on the bank and credit-market front, the most dangerous part of the current situation. His exposure to Wall Street over the years has been limited, and, in his scholarship, he has written only sparingly about financial crises and depressions. But, as a professor, Summers was often preoccupied with these phenomena in his endless banter with students and colleagues. The way Summers saw it, the Great Depression had been a problem of "multiple equilibria" gone awry. That is, he believed the economy could just as easily have been booming as shrinking. All it took was for everyone to believe that everyone else would start producing again, and they would too. But, since everyone believed everyone else would stay idle, they had no incentive to produce anything either. There was no good reason the economy should have been in this rut. But, once there, it was spectacularly difficult to get out.

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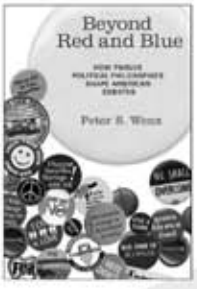

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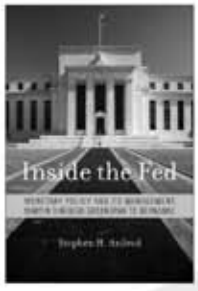

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Jim Hines, who was a grad student in those days, recalls Summers grappling with this idea at length. He'd often compare it to the market for men's suits, which are typically sold in even sizes but not odd ones. "How did we settle on forty, forty-two, forty-four?" he'd ask, "and not thirty-nine, forty-one, forty-three?" Summers could think of no explanation. But what *was* evident was that, once everyone had settled on 40s and 42s, almost no off-the-rack manufacturer would make a 41. "Larry likened that"—being stuck in a world of even sizes—"to the Great Depression," Hines recalls.

In 1991, Summers collected some of his thoughts on the subject in an informal paper for a volume edited by Martin Feldstein. At the time, the economics profession was still consumed by the market crash of October 1987—the largest one-day percentage drop in stock-market history. Perhaps more importantly, many economists wondered why the crash hadn't triggered a recession. Some suggested that the link between Wall Street's performance and the economy's performance—so devastating in the pre-war era—had been severed by modern policymaking.

Summers countered that it would be a mistake to draw confidence from 1987. He spent part of the paper constructing a nightmare scenario: In the run-up to a boom, regulators approved "mini-stock market futures contracts" that allowed investors to control $35,000 worth of stock with just $2,000 in cash. "Lawyers and dentists explained to one another that investing without margin was a mistake," Summers drolly observed. Then came the crash, which, in an eerily prescient detail, ensued "after a poorly supervised trader lost $500 million … in the newly developed foreign-mortgage-backed securities market."

Before long, banks were failing, credit was contracting, and bodies were piling up faster than in an '80s slasher flick. "The result was the worst recession since the Depression," Summers wrote. And none of it had required a leap that was implausible in the early '90s or today. The only way to avoid this gruesome fate, Summers concluded, was for the government to take quick, bold steps to restore confidence.

As head of the National Economic Council, Summers should be well-situated to impose this vision. Though the traditional role of the NEC chairman is to synthesize all the economic options that bubble up from various corners of an administration and present them dispassionately to the president, no one pretends that Summers's NEC much resembles this model. Thanks to his vast intellectual range and the urgency of the moment, Summers has thus far taken a leading role in the housing plan, the auto industry rescue, health care, and energy, in addition to the stimulus. But, when it comes to the bank bailout, the consensus is that Summers has scrupulously respected Geithner's turf. It's not that Summers doesn't have opinions of his own, or that he doesn't share them with Geithner. But, to the extent the two disagree, it's Geithner who gets his way. This is perhaps one reason why the bank bailout seems, in terms of its aggressiveness and boldness, the least Summers-like of all the administration's economic plans.

In July, when he was still a civilian, Summers argued in the *Financial Times* that the government should use its "receivership power" over Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to wipe out holders of regular and preferred stock and certain types of bonds, "conserving cash for the benefit of taxpayers." He said it should run the companies until the financial crisis passed—perhaps a period of several years—before selling off certain components to the private sector. "It is a time for decisive action," Summers wrote.

As the financial crisis has deepened, many economists have proposed something roughly analogous for the country's largest commercial banks. Geithner has so far resisted. The Treasury secretary has opted instead to bolster the balance sheets of hard-up banks with capital from last fall's bank bailout, and to provide government financing for investors interested in purchasing depressed assets. In fairness, there are any number of reasons why someone might support nationalization for Fannie and Freddie but oppose it for large banks, whose balance sheets and business models are far more complex. Still, one can't help wondering if the administration might now be inching toward some version of Summers's *FT* approach had he been in charge at Treasury. (Summers declined to comment on hypotheticals.)

There is surely real value to Summers's respect for institutional boundaries. And no one thinks Larry Summers has suddenly become Sally Quinn. Colleagues say he remains fiercely opinionated in meetings; his humor is sometimes cutting.

Still, the question arises: If the Obama administration fails to revive the economy, will it be because Summers is too influential over economic policy, or not influential enough? If not for the Harvard flap, Summers might be running Treasury, which, owing to its size, can bring far more infrastructure to bear on the economic crisis than NEC. But the Obama administration reportedly feared a difficult confirmation battle, making the White House post more attractive. (To be sure, there were other reasons Summers didn't get the job, like Obama's desire for a fresh face.)

Of course, even if Summers had overcome concerns about his abrasiveness and ascended to the Treasury job, he would face still another set of hurdles. There is, for example, the lesson Rubin shares in his book—"the difficulties our political processes have in dealing effectively with issues that involve technical complexities, shorter-term cost to achieve longer-term gain, incomplete information and uncertain outcomes, opportunities for political advantage, and inadequate understanding." Which is to say, it's not clear our political system is even equipped to deal with economic crisis. With the financial markets teetering and Congress refusing to give the administration another cent to save the crumbling banking system, one could be forgiven for thinking the lesson still applies. Even the stimulus, bold when it was conceived, no longer looks sufficient. But Congress is unlikely to part with more money any time soon.

When I asked Summers about Rubin's worry, he was mostly at ease. Then I reminded him that he'd once expressed similar concerns himself. In the scenario he'd cooked up for his article in 1991, Congress had insisted on cutting the deficit in the middle of the crisis, taking money out of the economy at the very moment it was needed most. Political leaders feared that "increases in budget deficits would have disastrous consequences for business confidence," Summers had written. "Spending was cut, and even some minor taxes were increased." The effect was to push the country into the abyss.

Summers thought for a minute and conceded the point: "There are times when it would be far easier as an economist to make a recommendation and move forward." Then he added, quite diplomatically, "But checks and balances, including the give and take with Congress, are an essential part of democracy, and we are far better with the process we have in place than without." ◆

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Obama vs. Marx

Hint: One of them's not a socialist.

ALAN WOLFE

The word "liberal" was first used in its modern political sense in 1812, when Spaniards wrote a new constitution liberating themselves from monarchical rule. As it happens, the word "socialism" originated in roughly the same period; it came into existence to describe the utopian ideas of the British reformer Robert Owen. Such timing suggests two possibilities: Either the fates of liberalism and socialism are so interlinked that one is all but synonymous with the other—or the two are actually competitors developed to meet similar conditions, in which case victory for one marks the defeat of the other.

These days, one could be forgiven for believing that the former conclusion is correct. It was not so long ago that conservatives were equating liberalism with fascism; today, they have executed a 180-degree swing in order to argue that liberalism is actually synonymous with socialism. "Americans," proclaimed Republican Senator Jim DeMint at the recent meeting of the Conservative Political Action Conference, "have gotten a glimpse of the big-government plans of Obama and the Democrats and are ready to stand up, speak out, and, yes, even to take to the streets to stop America's slide into socialism." But it isn't just the right that has worked itself into a frenzy; on the question of whether we are approaching a new age of socialism, there seems to be remarkable political consensus. In recent weeks, the covers of *National Review* ("our socialist future"), *The Nation* ("reinventing capitalism, reimagining socialism"), and *Newsweek* ("we are all socialists now") have—respectively—lamented, heralded, and observed the coming rise of socialism.

But all these commentators—right, left, and middle—may want to take a deep breath. We aren't headed for an era of socialism at all, since socialism is not a natural outgrowth of liberalism. Liberalism is a political philosophy that seeks to extend personal autonomy to as many people as possible, if necessary through positive government action; socialism, by contrast, seeks as much equality as possible, even if doing so curtails individual liberty. These are differences of kind, not degree—differences that have historically placed the two philosophies

Christine Car

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in direct competition. Today, socialism is on the decline, in large part because liberalism has lately been on the rise. And, if Barack Obama's version of liberalism succeeds, socialism will be even less popular than it already is.

Socialism was born in political conditions that no longer exist. In its most radical form, the one associated with Marx and Engels, it had far more in common with European romanticism than with the moderate reformism of a John Stuart Mill or a Thomas Hill Green, two of Great Britain's most important liberal thinkers. Socialism seemed possible when anything seemed possible. It was an ideology of progress when progress was an unquestioned good. Even its less revolutionary adherents, those more likely to call themselves social democrats rather than socialists, believed in economic planning and social transformation in ways that seem embarrassing now. Once it appeared possible for government to control the major means of production. Now it seems impossible to build a high-speed rail between Boston and Washington.

The story of socialism's decline is essentially a European story. Socialism has never had much appeal in the United States, but that was not always the case on the other side of the Atlantic. The temptation toward socialism was not just on display in Eastern Europe; in the western half of the continent, too, left-wing governments and parties quite openly embraced socialist programs for much of the twentieth century. Those days, however, are largely over. In Britain, the Labour Party no longer pays much homage to its socialist roots. Tony Blair revived the party only after leading a campaign to alter its notorious Clause IV, which had explicitly endorsed the "common ownership of the means of production." The revised version proclaimed Labour a "democratic socialist" party, but the wording was so vague, and Blair so consistently ignored it, that its purposes were symbolic only. On this crucial point, Gordon Brown has not backtracked in the least.

Elsewhere in Europe, the same movement against socialism dominates the political landscape. Socialism in the form of social democracy was long the governing ideology of Scandinavia, but Swedes never much liked the idea of nationalizing industries, and the Danes have for some time been governed by conservatives—called, in European parlance, liberals. Angela Merkel is anything but a socialist; the same is true for Nicolas Sarkozy. "Americanization" was once a dirty word in France. Now it fairly well describes Sarkozy's domestic program. There is talk of reforming the country's Napoleonic legal system with something more resembling our insistence upon rights. Public bureaucracies, including France's complex system of higher education, are to be reformed along more "modern"—read American—lines. Spain, meanwhile, does have a socialist government; but its leftism is a reaction to the extreme conservatism that governed the country for much of the twentieth century. For their part, the Eastern European countries now outdo each other in their love for the free market.

It is true that European societies are committed to an active role for government and that a number of their public policies, such as national health insurance, owe something to the socialist tradition. But the roots of the European welfare state are much more complex than is commonly acknowledged. European ideas about government have Christian as well as socialist origins. Two great papal encyclicals—*Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931)—spurred Catholic countries to adopt the idea that government should protect the rights of workers and that society has an obligation to help all. One of Great Britain's most eloquent defenders of equality, the Fabian socialist R. H. Tawney, was a devout Protestant. After World War II, Christian parties siphoned off votes that might have gone to more radical politicians by emphasizing traditions of solidarity and community. If Obama is really leading us down the road to Europeanization, an equally accurate *Newsweek* headline might be, "We are all Christian Democrats now."

And the origins of big government in Europe run deeper than either Marx or Christian politics. It is not exactly socialism that has stifled so much of French economic life with cumbersome regulations but a blunderbuss government that dates back to the *ancien régime*. Socialist politicians in France did not invent the idea of big government. They instead relied on traditions of *étatism* that had long preceded them. Given all this, it's no wonder that liberalism is experiencing a comeback in Europe. The revival of liberal sentiment is as much a reaction against both Christianity and feudalism as anything else.

As for Obama, it is absurd to view his program as a step toward socialism. First of all, while he is planning to raise taxes, they will still be lower than what is common in other Western countries. And, according to Brian Reidl of the Heritage Foundation, Obama's budget would increase government spending from 20 percent of GDP to 22 percent. Is it really possible that a society is capitalist when government spending represents 20 percent of GDP—but socialist at 22 percent?

Next, consider Obama's stances on the defining issues of our time. At most, his administration might nationalize banks temporarily; a socialist would nationalize them for good. He proposes to fix free trade, not abolish it. He does not favor a single-payer health care system, and any proposal he eventually puts forward is going to involve competition in some form. (It is worth noting that arguably the biggest beneficiaries of health care reform will be businesses, many of which struggle to pay their employees' health care costs.) To address global warming, Obama favors cap and trade, a market-oriented solution to our gravest environmental problem. That's right: This alleged socialist has so much faith in capitalism, he is willing to put the future of our planet more or less in the hands of a market.

What these ideas have in common is, first, an attachment to economic freedom that no self-respecting socialist would countenance. In fact, most of Obama's measures are designed to save, not destroy, the instruments of capitalism—businesses and the markets in which they compete. Should Obama get everything he wants, liberals will have once again—as has happened so often in the United States—gone a long way toward rescuing capitalism from its worst excesses.

Moreover, it has for some time now been established that the moderate use of government to improve the lives of large numbers of citizens, while producing minor advances in equality, is primarily about giving citizens more liberty. People who, with the help of government, need not postpone medical care or can avoid going into lifetime debt to pay for it are freer people. Progressive taxation, especially the way Obama talks about it, is not about confiscating the wealth of the rich but about giving those at the bottom of the ladder more opportunity. Modest enhancements of what has been called "positive liberty" do not come anywhere close to socialism; they instead make liberalism's benefits more widespread.

Conservatives seem to think that any increase in the size of government

ANTHONY RUSSO

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means a step toward socialism. But, if this is the case, then George W. Bush ought to come out of the closet as a socialist. It is not just that Bush spent uncountable sums on his Iraqi adventure. Nor is it that he put Keynes to shame by spending money he did not have. Bush, at least at the start of his presidency, wanted to be known for his compassion and sponsored reforms of both Medicare and education that, had a Democrat proposed them, would have been widely denounced by conservatives as socialism run rampant. Socialism, in the Republican imagination, is only something Democrats do, never something they themselves do.

In the United States, liberalism is the alternative to which we turn when conservatism fails, just as in Europe it is what people look to when socialism sputters, Christianity no longer appeals, and the old feudal statism appears moribund. Liberalism has always been more comfortable finding its place between the extremes than mimicking either one of them. Americans tend to be most familiar with the ways in which liberalism distinguishes itself from conservatism. But liberalism has gone to great lengths to distinguish itself from the left as well—from the gulag, the Soviet occupation of Eastern European countries against the will of their people, and all the various forms of socialism from Baathism to Castroism associated with Third World tyrants. These distinctions have reaffirmed the liberal dedication to human rights—and this at a time when conservatives like Bush and Cheney were prepared to dispense with them. Conservatives may denounce Obama for his socialism, but it is he, and not they, who is returning the United States to such liberal commitments as the separation of powers, habeas corpus, and transparency in government.

If Barack Obama is a socialist, he sure is good at fooling people. Americans seem to like his quiet demeanor, his sense of caution, his efforts at inclusion. With its emphasis on intellectual modesty and pragmatism, liberalism is a temperament as well as a set of ideas; and Obama's disposition is quintessentially liberal.

We cannot at this point know what his legacy will be. But we do know what it will not be. Eight years of Obama, and the United States has its best chance in decades to return to the liberalism that has long defined its heritage. There would be no greater blow to socialism—in America, in Europe, or anywhere else—than for this venture to succeed. ◆

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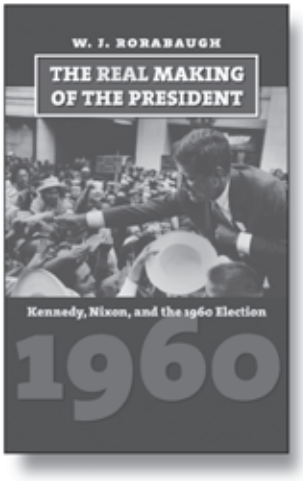

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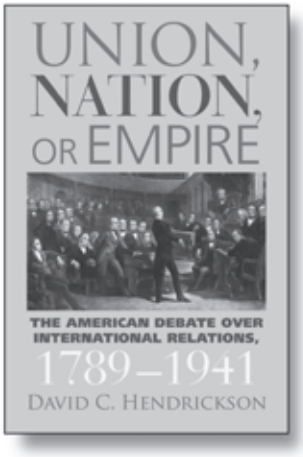

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

CHANGES

THE BEST FILMS I know by the greatly gifted Jan Troell, who is Swedish, are set in the Scandinavian past. *Here's Your Life* takes place in Sweden during World War I; *The Emigrants* and *The New Land* form a diptych about nineteenth-century Swedish immigrants; *Hamsun* is of course about the Norwegian writer who died in 1952. Merely to mention those films is to wish that every viewer knew them.

Now, after some years of absence—at least from the United States—here is Troell again with his latest visit to the past. *Everlasting Moments* takes place in the decade beginning in 1907, is set mostly in Malmö in southern Sweden, and is once again distinguished by this director's typical combination of loveliness and grit. The screenplay, by Troell and two others, focuses on a stratified society in which the working class knows its place but is beginning to know more.

One of the means through which this change arrives is especially congruent here. That means is photography. A camera figures in Troell's story and becomes a catalyst. Implicit in this change is a tremendous historical truth: the camera revised the scale of human values. Until it was invented, the chief way of recording faces, of preserving and sharing an individual's personal qualities, was a portrait done by an artist, and the subjects were preponderantly people of the upper classes. The camera, in a relatively short time, broke that exclusivity. Now every face was a possible subject. The porter, the mechanic, the laundry woman now shared the previous privilege of princes. Any face could become a memento of humanity. Can this huge change in the scale of individual importance have had no effect on society? Can it be sheer accident that photography arrived coincidentally with the nineteenth century's irruption in social and political turbulence?

EVERLASTING MOMENTS
IFC FILMS

12
SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

Maria Larsson is a working-class bride who has won a camera in a lottery. She forgets about it as she plunges into a hectic life of housekeeping and mothering. (Eventually she has seven children.) Her husband, Sigfrid, is a husky dock laborer who is often brought home drunk and whose womanizing is no secret. Evidently his behavior is one kind of pattern in their world: Maria dislikes but accepts it in him as part of a working man's life. She accepts, too, his beating of her, which is apparently another part of her predetermined lot. Oddly, the children accept it, too. When Sigfrid is walloping Maria, they are frightened, but in a few minutes he is calmed and is hugging the kids whom he adores, and they respond affectionately.

Maria has no thought of leaving Sigfrid. Presumably she knows many other wives in similar situations. But one day she happens to come across that camera. Something more than curiosity takes hold. Subtly but persistently, she senses that if she follows it, she may open doors.

A Danish man named Pedersen runs a photography studio and shop in Malmö. Maria visits with her camera to learn how to use it, and slowly she and Pedersen become friends. There is no suggestion of an affair in the weeks to come, but as she learns more about the camera, there is a meeting of spirits. Maria is entering an enlarged world.

While this camera relationship is growing, Sigfrid is drafted into the army—World War I is simmering—but he never even gets a uniform. Sweden is neutral. He does, however, meet a political radical whom he likes but whose ideas do not win him. Sigfrid gives this radical the teasing nickname of the man's favorite author, Kropotkin. Sigfrid's brush with radicalism might have done for him what the camera did for Maria: altered his view of himself and his definition of fate. But it doesn't seriously affect him.

When Sigfrid discovers Maria's interest in photography and a photographer, he reacts as expected. After his outburst, her older children counsel her to leave him and join Pedersen, who is about to return to Denmark. Other factors enter. Her story ends with a self-portrait.

Troell's screenplay, as has often been the case with him, exists for the fullness of its texture, not for dramatic growth and resolution. We spend two hours-plus in a thoroughly plumbed environment, with its complications of sex, family love, accustomed stratification, possible social change. Conditioned as we are by expectations of form, we anticipate—perhaps unawares—certain developments. But a peculiar truth holds about a Troell film: it is not necessarily a cumulative drama with an organic resolution. Certainly Troell has a sense of the dramatic moment, but he sees it as a moment in a life that has other moments before and after—not as an element in a growing structure. Principally, with a Troell film, the viewer relishes some richly comprehended characters, marvelously presented. Ingmar Bergman, master dramatist though he was, once said that his chief interest in filmmaking was the human face. No wonder he admired this man.

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Troell began as a cinematographer, and he has shot most of his films (including most of this one). In a film world where fine cinematography is now common, he is still exceptional. Light, light in itself, he obviously treats as one of his characters. (A passing instance: a shot of a dark street with a street lamp—a chiaroscuro incident—is unforgettable.) His sense of color is acute. In *Everlasting Moments*, we never feel that he is manipulating visually, yet we can see, especially in the scenes in the Larsson home, that the realism is keyed to a suggestion of sepia—which suggests the atmosphere of the place.

The three leading actors give us completed roles. Mikael Persbrandt makes Sigfrid a man who believes that his life of heavy labor and wife-beating and child-hugging, of drinking and whoring, is what heaven has assigned him. Jesper Christensen as the photographer is gentleness incarnate yet with no tick of sentimentality. Maria Heiskanen as Maria takes us along on her modest but exciting voyage of self-discovery. She enables us to imagine—we *want* to imagine—what she is not always displaying. She is a fitting actress for a director whose primary interest is communion.

Twelve Angry Men is a set of promises that are kept. That is the secret of its success—on television, stage, and screen. The opening minutes of Reginald Rose's piece show us twelve jurors in a locked room considering their verdict. Thus, automatically, it promises us that whatever verdict seems likely at first, the opposite verdict will finally prevail. Why else would we be there? Further, en route to that verdict each of the jurors will have an emotional aria related somehow to the issues of the trial. Why else would these particular men be there? Then we sit back and watch the work keep its word. The kitschy warmth at the end comes partly because the jury's action provides what an audience always likes to see—one more demonstration that human beings, these jurors and us, are basically decent people who merely need to think things over once in a while in order to be just. Another part of the warmth comes from the fact that we read the script's promises rightly and they were kept.

A new metamorphosis of Rose's play shows that this audience hunger for approval of itself is not an American monopoly. *12*, based on *Twelve Angry Men*, is set in Moscow. Nikita Mikhalkov, actor and director and co-writer, has charged this version with a subject of outsize gravity. In Rose's original, the defendant is a Puerto Rican boy accused of killing his father. Here the defendant is a Chechen youth accused of killing his Russian stepfather. Thus a great deal more than one crime is implicitly involved.

Mikhalkov arranges matters so that, because of repair work in the courthouse, the jury has to meet in a high school gym. So he discards the steam-bath feeling of the compressed jury room to acquire chances for camera shenanigans, circlings of the table, contrasts between close-ups and long shots, and so on. It also gives him a chance for symbolism: a sparrow flies into the gym early on, flits about during the deliberations, and finally finds freedom again. Thus we learn—fortunate us—that the spirit has misadventures but must never give up.

Still, even the grave implications of Chechnya do not make the script any more than a moderately clever mechanism. What keeps the film vital is the acting. The characters are mixed. Mikhalkov himself plays the foreman of the jury with some dignity and poise. Also on hand are, among others, a surgeon, a cabbie, an engineer, and an actor; there is even a Holocaust survivor to evoke anti-Semitism in a juror who is there for us to dislike. Every one of these actors is versed in theater acting *à la Russe*. Like many actors from Eastern Europe, they know how to supply more than we are used to—in films, anyway—and make it valid. No gesture, no intonation, is left bland. And this vivid coloring underscores that the whole piece is much more theatrical than realistic.

It would be easy and mistaken to call these actors hams. Ham actors are bad actors, whether grand or laconic. These men are masters of a kind of acting that is spheres away from, say, the estimable De Niro and Duvall. There is more than one style of good acting (though we do not see much variety these days). When Bernard Shaw was a theater critic, he liked to go to a certain theater in London even though it specialized in sentimental drama because it had "good acting and plenty of it." He might have liked *12*. ◆

Jed Perl on Art

COMPLICATED BLISS

There is a tropical heat in Pierre Bonnard's late paintings. This subtle hedonist, a contemplative spirit with king-sized obsessions, regards the colors on his palette as objects of delectation. Each stroke of alizarin or orange or green paint that he works into the canvas has a life-giving power. Bonnard's canvases are blossoms at the peak of their beauty, and because there is a strong element of improvisation and risk involved in his technique, we are constantly reminded that beauty is unreliable, that blossoms will decay, that ripe fruit will rot, and that the bright afternoon sun will fade to darkest night. No other artist offers such complicated bliss.

PIERRE BONNARD: THE LATE INTERIORS
Metropolitan Museum of Art

"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors," at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is an extraordinarily satisfying exhibition. Both in Europe and the United States there has been no lack of Bonnard shows in recent years, but of the ones I have seen, which include "Pierre Bonnard: Early and Late" at the Phillips Collection in Washington in 2002 and the retrospective that came to the Museum of Modern Art in 1998, this is the most cogent and coherent. Dita Amory, the curator for the Metropolitan exhibition, was right to focus on the artist's fascination with the interior of Le Bosquet, the little house in the village of Le Cannet overlooking Cannes. Bonnard bought the house in 1926 and lived in it year round for the eight years leading up to his death in 1947. Amory demonstrates how Bonnard turned these modest rooms into a laboratory where the discoveries of the Impressionists, by then half-a-century old, were renewed in entirely unexpected ways.

The installation, which is not strictly chronological, emphasizes Bonnard's tendency to move back and forth between relatively greater and lesser degrees of naturalism and abstraction. This gives the show something of the quality of a meditation, which is appropriate for Bonnard. His late self-portraits, two of which are included at the Metropolitan, suggest the asceticism of a Chinese sage, with close-cropped hair and long, narrow, all-seeing eyes. In the canvases of his last twenty years, which Bonnard did in his studio rather than from direct observation, the Impressionist insistence on working in front of the motif gives way to memories

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of the motif, so that perception turns out to be not so much a reality as a dream.

Visitors to the Metropolitan may initially be surprised to find that none of the paintings of Marthe, Bonnard's wife, in her bathroom have been included. In those supremely strange canvases, Bonnard invented what amounts to an entirely new variation on the theme of the naked goddess, a Venus in a white-tiled bathroom, the bathtub sometimes suggesting a sarcophagus. Many observers have come to regard them as the climax of Bonnard's career. While an interesting argument can be made for that idea, there is something equally attractive about the focus of this show, which is on Bonnard's miraculous transformations of ordinary objects. Although many of the canvases contain figures, in these works the women Bonnard liked to paint, often based on Marthe, tend to play a supporting role, and we are mostly engaged by the animation of the inanimate.

Here the starring roles go to baskets, dishes, fruits, flowers, chairs, tables, and windows. The figures, often at the periphery, suggest puppeteers who are arranging the comestibles on the stage that is the dining room table. Going through the exhibition—which is a manageable size, with some fifty paintings and a generous selection of works on paper in pencil, gouache, and watercolor—I kept thinking of something that Balthus said he learned from Bonnard, namely that you could make a painting out of anything, even something as ordinary as a radiator. This show, which includes some remarkable studies of radiators, is about Bonnard's ability to make the commonplace ecstatic.

Bonnard is the most thoroughly idiosyncratic of all the great twentieth-century painters. What sustains him is not traditional ideas of pictorial structure and order, but rather some unique combination of visual taste, psychological insight, and poetic feeling. He also has a quality that might be characterized as perceptual wit—an instinct for what will work in a painting. Almost invariably he recognizes the precise point where his voluptuousness may be getting out of hand, where he needs to introduce an ironic note. Bonnard's wit has everything to do with the eccentric nature of his compositions. He finds it funny to sneak a figure into a corner, or have a cat staring out at the viewer. His metaphoric caprices have a comic edge, as when he turns a figure into a pattern in the wallpaper. And when he imagines a basket of fruit as a heap of emeralds and rubies and diamonds, he does so with the panache of a magician pulling a rabbit out of a hat.

The paintings are tremendously odd, with their off-kilter compositions and inconsistently rendered objects and peek-a-boo women—and yet the ultimate effect is of a blazing formal power, even if it is a formal power that is achieved through means that some might think un-formal if not anti-formal. One of the less widely exhibited masterworks in this show is *Interior: Dining Room*, formerly in the Mellon collection and now in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Here Bonnard turns his dining room into a sunset vision, the walls as luridly multicolored as clouds hit by the sun's last rays, except that the clouds are up-ended, suggesting striped wallpaper or painted wainscoting. One of the enigmas of Bonnard's work—and the question must certainly be raised with the Virginia Museum painting—is why his warm-on-warm color orchestrations, while often approaching the exaggerations of kitsch, rarely go over the top. Especially in the 1940s, when he was working on this canvas, Bonnard liked to flirt with vulgarity. The walls in the Virginia Museum interior, composed of strokes of orange and violet and yellow paint, suggest melting sherbet. I think Bonnard knows this. He is making a joke. But just when it looks as if he has succumbed to a sort of high camp—and what could be less attractive than that?—he shifts gears. He fills the lower third of the canvas with a white table cloth, touched with elements of blue, that suggests the slow movement in a tumultuous Romantic sonata. Like Nabokov, Bonnard is saved from the excesses of his hedonism by a trickster's contrariety.

Pierre Bonnard, *Interior: Dining Room,* 1942-46

Bonnard gives the impression of working without preconceptions, allowing themes to interpenetrate and motifs to transfigure each other. When he paints a group of objects arranged on a table before a window, he mingles still life and landscape, creating a hybrid genre. Frequently in his later years he goes even further, conflating two of the great themes in Western art: the still life or interior as a celebration of bourgeois experience, and the pastoral tradition that measures mankind's present condition against some earlier, supposedly more natural condition. In Bonnard's late interiors and still lifes, the dining room and the sitting room, the basket of fruit and the vase of flowers, the table laid for a meal—these are all recast as pastoral visions, as indoor Arcadian landscapes. Pastoral, as it evolved in the poetry of Theocritus and Virgil, reflected an urban yearning for country simplicity, but the simple life was not always so simple, for shepherds had their troubles and pleasure always turned out to be transitory. Bonnard knows this. This most sophisticated of modern artists paints the interior spaces in his house in the south of France with the same eye that Theocritus and Virgil brought to the lives of their shepherds, an eye both loving and critical, an eye that joins and juxtaposes elements of naturalism, lyricism, and comedy.

While Bonnard's feeling for the poetry of interior spaces can be related to a strain in European art that includes Carpaccio, van Eyck, and Vermeer, he rejects the European interest in delimitedness, in the clear articulation of space, in objects that are so thoroughly objectified that they transcend their objecthood—a development that culminated in Chardin's sublime art. Bonnard is more interested in meanderings and mood

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shifts, in irresolution and dissolution. While Chardin's still lifes tend to have clearly defined climaxes, Bonnard prefers to pull away from a climax. His compositions depend on a process of decomposition. The arrangements can be un- or even anti-geometric. He likes the fragment, the vignette, the skewed panorama, the epic-in-miniature. And the Southern sunlight is the great unifier, drawing disparate elements into a luminous whole. The result is a disorderly opulence.

Dita Amory has wisely included a generous selection of works on paper. They are essential to our understanding of Bonnard's working method. Bonnard regarded drawing as his primary opportunity to directly confront the world, after which his paintings, done in the studio, could develop an increasingly ambiguous relationship with reality, and even suggest a world of dreams. It was through his drawings, generally done in humble pencil, that he discovered the particular elements—a figure's pose, an arrangement of fruit, a juxtaposition of furniture—that would then be incorporated in the paintings that he worked on over long periods of time. Bonnard's pencil drawings announce the first steps in his dissociation from reality, with their curious areas of penciled dots and dashes that manage to suggest a wide range of textures and colors and spatial relationships.

Especially fascinating are the little datebooks in which he noted down still life elements or fragments of figures or landscape. These are ordinary datebooks, the sort that one uses for appointments, and in addition to Bonnard's daily notations about the weather there are vignettes of a table top, a woman, a landscape. Bonnard may well have made his drawings on the particular day marked in the book, and I think there is reason to believe that he found something appealing in the sketchbook that doubled as a daybook. He was marking off the days and the seasons as they passed—again like the ancient poets, who wrote about the particular work that farmers and shepherds did at particular times of the year. These are Bonnard's *Works and Days*, a how-to book about the artist's life in the countryside, the customized manual from which his paintings emerge.

When Bonnard bought Le Bosquet in 1926, he was on the verge of his sixtieth birthday. He was in retreat in the country, which is itself a classical ideal. He had achieved renown already as a young man, one of the artists in the circle around the magazine *La Revue Blanche*, a visual poet of the fin-de-siècle, painting intimate scenes of bohemian life and designing prints and posters that have become defining images of the period. Bonnard and his friend Vuillard created an irreplaceable pictorial record of one of the great patrons and muses of the period, Misia Sert, who was married for a time to a founder of *La Revue Blanche*, and who in the art of her painter friends is seen reading or playing the piano in interiors where the floral wallpapers and fabrics suggest a forest in a medieval legend. The cult of pastoral life was very much a part of Misia's world. In 1902 Bonnard did illustrations for Longus's *Daphnis and Chloé*. And between 1906 and 1919 he would paint, for Misia and others, a series of murals on rural themes in which time tends to bend, with contemporary figures echoing the lives of classical shepherds and nymphs, while classical figures are painted with a familiarity that suggests that they are in fact our contemporaries.

Among the artists Bonnard would always revere were two of the great pastoralists who were working in the early twentieth century, Maillol and Renoir. Although Renoir's work is not much admired today, in the early twentieth century his nudes and his landscapes were closely studied by Picasso, Matisse, and—as we can see here—Bonnard. One of the strongest influences on Bonnard's colors, almost melting together, is surely the later style of Renoir, who lived in the south of France and whom Bonnard often visited in the years leading up to the old Impressionist's death in 1919.

While there are passages in the still lifes at the Metropolitan where Chardin's intense scrutiny of single objects comes to mind, the discursiveness of Bonnard's style in his late work moves away from the classical architecture of French painting and brings us very close to many of the sophisticated tastes of the fin-de-siècle. Japanese and Chinese painting, which were being enthusiastically studied by artists in those years, are surely an influence, with their curious formats and asymmetrically arranged objects—their general sense of a world caught off guard. So, I imagine, are Monet's *Water Lilies*, which were only beginning to be produced in the first years of the new century and some of which were installed in the Orangerie in Paris in 1927, where they had the effect of shattering the enclosed dimensions of the gallery, of turning an urban space into a watery garden where near and far and up and down could no longer be neatly plotted.

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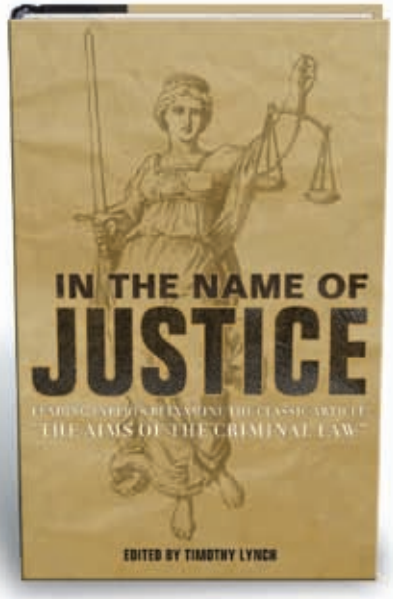

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I suspect that more than painting contributed to the evolution of Bonnard's art. When Bonnard started out, art nouveau was introducing a radically new way of thinking about interior spaces. (Bonnard did some furniture designs.) The emphasis was always on natural forms, whether in wallpapers or fabrics or furniture or ceramics or glass. Interiors were saturated with flowers and vines and shrubberies. The Gallé glass and the furnishings by Guimard and Majorelle served to melt away the sharp edges of the old four-square rooms, turning them into rustic retreats, albeit of an exquisitely artificial kind. I think that this idea, which Bonnard would have absorbed as a young man, remained somewhere in the back of his mind, emboldening him, after he retreated to the south of France, to conflate interior spaces and exterior spaces.

Bonnard continued to paint landscapes until the very end of his life. He responded fervently to the extraordinary foliage that surrounded his house. The red rooftops of Cannes and the Mediterranean beyond were abiding subjects. The last canvas on which he worked was a tiny study of a blossoming almond tree, its white blooms suggesting an ecstatic dusting of snow. In those later years, however, his own house became more and more a sort of metaphorical grove or grotto, a place of final retreat at the center of the sanctuary that the south had turned out to be for him in the war years and their immediate aftermath. In Bonnard's late interiors and still lifes, the pastoral tradition is brought inside and inward, becoming a dimension of the artist's mental world. For Bonnard, the pastoral had never been the cool, almost mathematically lucid realm that many associate, not entirely accurately, with Poussin. He always gravitated toward the more casually ordered pastoral vision that had begun to evolve just after 1500 in the Venetian paintings of Giorgione. This was a world of ardors and ambiguities, where happiness was never assured and love was always unpredictable. (This particular version of pastoral was the subject of a memorable exhibition, "The Pastoral Landscape: The Legacy of Venice," organized by the late Robert Cafritz at the National Gallery and the Phillips Collection twenty years ago.)

The key work in the Venetian pastoral tradition is the *Concert champêtre* in the Louvre, nowadays officially attributed to Titian, although I am in agreement with the scholars who believe that this curious vision, with its rustic shepherd and urban dandy and two naked women, is from the hand of Giorgione. What characterizes the Giorgionesque tradition is a preference for free-flowing, anti-architectonic compositions, a suspicion that private meanings will always trump public avowals, and a belief that storytelling ought to be discursive, open-ended. These ideas, developed by Giorgione and re-invented two hundred years later by Watteau, find their most powerful twentieth-century expression in the work of Bonnard. For Giorgione and Watteau, the pastoral was anything but a neat equation, and Bonnard makes it messier still. By turning his own home into the nymph's and the shepherd's final retreat, he creates a new variation on the pastoral, one that is droll and strange and altogether unpredictable—a pastoral place where dream and reality bump into each other, confound each other. These paintings are hymns to a delicious confusion, an equivocal paradise, where Eve's apples have been brought in from the garden and arranged on the table along with many other temptations.

There is only one thing wrong with this exhibition, and that is its location. My heart sank when I realized that once again a great show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art had been consigned downstairs to the Lehman Wing, the same awful spaces into which last fall's Morandi show was shoehorned. These galleries are hardly more than corridors, with appallingly poor lighting and no room to get back from the paintings. That the Metropolitan—a museum full of beautiful galleries eloquently proportioned, with fine ambient light—can find no better place for these essential exhibitions is deeply discouraging. I am sure there is some practical explanation as to why Morandi and Bonnard have been so poorly served, but practicalities are not everything.

What we ought to be concentrating on right now, at a time when the museum has a new director and may be moving in new directions, is the extent to which these two brilliant modern exhibitions offer a blueprint for the future. Although it is Thomas Campbell, the museum's new director, who wrote the forward to the Bonnard show, both the Morandi and Bonnard exhibitions were given the go-ahead during the directorship of Philippe de Montebello, and they stand as yet another demonstration of his museological genius. Both exhibitions focus on artists whose towering achievements have sometimes been relegated to the periphery in favor of a modernist orthodoxy based on ideas of fast-forward evolution and the violent overthrow of tradition. Both exhibitions challenge museumgoers to reconsider all the old clichés about what is radical and what is conservative in modern art. (The Museum of Modern Art has *never* presented a show of Morandi's paintings, and the Bonnard retrospective mounted there ten years ago was a confused affair, significantly inferior to Amory's exhibition.)

In his forward to the Morandi catalogue, Philippe de Montebello observes "Morandi never fit into the declamatory, self-aggrandizing mode of the most prominent twentieth-century masters." De Montebello makes it quite clear what he has in mind, speaking of Morandi as a "marginalized" figure, and concluding that "the time is ripe for a vaster appreciation of Morandi's rightful place in the canon of modern art." As for the Bonnard show, the fact that de Montebello gave the exhibition the green light would seem to reflect his own sense that late Bonnard is another achievement that has still not quite earned its "rightful place in the canon of modern art." But as de Montebello surely knows, the situation is even more interesting than that. Bonnard created a profoundly powerful art without reference to many of the canonical discoveries of modern art. His late paintings would have been possible even if Cubism and abstract art had never happened. By inviting New Yorkers to study Morandi and the late Bonnard, then, de Montebello is urging them to contemplate an expanded history of twentieth-century art. We must hope that Thomas Campbell will have the self-confidence and the heterodox sophistication to encourage similar experiments in the future.

These two exhibitions consolidate the role that the Metropolitan has increasingly played in the ongoing life of art in New York and the United States, as the place where a large heterogeneous audience gathers to reflect freshly on what art has achieved—and where artists go to reinvigorate themselves, to grapple with the past that is our only guide to the future. By putting Morandi and Bonnard in what amounts to the basement, the museum may be revealing a certain anxiety about what precisely is past and what is future. And yet even down there, amid the grievously low wattage, this Bonnard show turns out to be a defining moment. Rarely has such an idiosyncratic painterly odyssey yielded such magisterial results. Opening in deepest winter, when the temperatures were freezing and the financial markets were in the doldrums, this great exhibition is a welcome glimpse of paradise—a domestic paradise, and therefore an attainable paradise. ◆

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Enrique Krauze

THE SHAH OF VENEZUELA

The ideas that keep Hugo Chávez in power, and their disastrous consequences.

I.

THE SACRALIZATION of history is an ancient practice in Latin America. In the region's Catholic countries, stories of the past, with their heroes and their villains, became instant paraphrases of the Holy Story, complete with martyrologies, holy days, and iconic representations of secular saints. But in Venezuela, where the presence of the church has been less rich and influential than in Mexico, Peru, or Ecuador, the transference of the sacred to the profane has been more intense, perhaps because of the lack of "competition" with strictly religious inspirations such as the Virgin of Guadalupe or the patron saints of Mexican towns. Venezuela's civic worship is unusual also in that it is monotheistic, which is to say, it has centered on the passion story of a man elevated to godhood. That man is Simón Bolívar.

In addition to parades, speeches, ceremonies, competitions, inaugurations, commemorations, unveilings of monuments, official publications, and other formal events in veneration of Bolívar that successive Venezuelan governments (oligarchic, civil, military, dictatorships) have produced, there arose a spontaneous and enduring popular cult of Bolívar already in 1842, just twelve years after his death. It was stoked by a kind of collective penitence for the sin of letting Bolívar die on Colombian soil. And so the liberator came to be relentlessly exalted by the same nation that, by rejecting his project for a Gran Colombia (which would have unified Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama), caused him to be ostracized. This Caribbean version of *Moses and Monotheism* was nicely codified by the Cardinal of Caracas in 1980, who declared from the seat of his diocese that all of Venezuela's misfortunes, the countless civil wars and the dictatorships of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, all sprang from the "treason" that was originally committed against Bolívar.

Official, popular, manufactured, spontaneous, classical, romantic, nationalist, internationalist, military, civil, religious, mythic, Venezuelan, Andean, Ibero-American, Pan-American, universal: the cult of Bolívar became the common bond of Venezuelans, the sacrament of their society. Other sanctified heroes shared the altar, but they stood in Bolívar's shadow, and they were not always beloved: Francisco de Miranda, an early champion of independence; Antonio José de Sucre, Bolívar's loyal grand marshal; and General José Antonio Páez (Bolívar's right hand in war, his adversary in peace, and the founder of the Republic of Venezuela). Even in scholarly circles his immaculate image prevailed until the 1960s. When, in 1916, a young doctor dared to suggest that Bolívar was probably an epileptic, the censure of this act of "patriotic atheism" against the Bolivarian faith—an "august, admirable, sublime religion"—was harsh. "How is it possible," it was said, "that a Venezuelan should ascend to the empyrean to remove Bolívar from Caesar's side, and relegate him to the inferno, beside Caligula?"

From a very young age, Hugo Chávez revered Simón Bolívar. And not just Bolívar. In his modest childhood in the small western plains city of Barinas, Chávez also intensely admired Chávez—that is, Chávez "El Látigo," or The Whip, a famous pitcher who was killed in a plane crash after a brief career in the major leagues. According to his own telling of his life story, when he entered the Military Academy in 1971, at the age of seventeen, Chávez visited the tomb of El Látigo to ask forgiveness, because new heroes were demanding his attention: Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Chávez was always a hero-worshipper. His personal pantheon included Ezequiel Zamora (the popular leader in the Federal War in the mid-nineteenth century) and his own great-grandfather, a bandit-rebel whose hazy career dated to the beginning of the twentieth century.

In Chávez's fevered imagination, the interesting thing about this past populated with heroes was that they spoke directly to him and ended up being reincarnated in him. "Let me tell you something I've never told anyone," he confessed to several friends. "I'm the reincarnation of Ezequiel Zamora." (Some say he has always feared he would come to the same end: betrayed and shot in the head.) With his contemporary heroes, too, Chávez needed direct contact, a laying on of hands. In an interview in 2005, he recalled his first encounters with Fidel. "My God, I want to meet Fidel when I get out and I'm free to talk," he prayed in prison, after his failed coup attempt in February 1992, "to tell him who I am and what I think." Their first meeting took place in Havana in December 1994. Castro stood waiting for him in person at the foot of the steps of his airplane. From then on, Chávez came to see him "as a father," and his children saw him as a grandfather.

> The day he came to visit Grandma's little house in Sabaneta, he had to stoop. It's a low door, and he's a giant. I saw it with my own eyes, didn't I? And I remarked on it to [my brother] Adán. Seeing him there, as if it was a dream: "this is like something out of a García Márquez novel." In other words, forty years after the first time I heard the name Fidel Castro, there he was in the house where we were raised.... My God!

García Márquez, indeed. During the fifteen years in which he patiently plotted his revolutionary conspiracy, forging his mystical links between his own genealogy and the nation's heroes, Hugo Chávez made himself into a kind of creature of magical realism. He would be the redemption, the climax, the supreme text prophesied by other texts, of the Sacred Writ of Venezuelan history.

CHÁVEZ THE CADET was a celebrant of the Bolivarian passion story. In 1974, as testified in his writings collected in 1992 under the title *Un brazalete tricolor*, or *A Three-Colored Armband*, his outbursts of lyricism about the liberator went beyond the reverential imagery (pictorial, verbal, sculptural) of neoclassical history, beyond the romantic and patriotic equation of Bolívar with Alexander, Caesar, or Napoleon, beyond even the grandiloquent official images of "the apotheosis of the demigod of South America." In that year the inflamed cadet wrote an encomium for the hero that began with this curious sentence: "On June 23, on the eve

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of the anniversary of the great Battle … of Carabobo, Simón Bolívar gave birth to the nation." As the Venezuelan historian Elías Pino Iturrieta has explained, Bolívar was, for young Chávez, God the Father, and the nation was the Virgin, and the Christ child was the army of liberation, which, in a leap across the centuries, was the same army to which Chávez belonged. In 1978, this florid notion would produce a natural corollary: that the Bolivarian army would return to the historical scene to restore the honor "of the humiliated mother," and bring continuity to the independence movement, and complete the work:

> It [the army] is your child, Venezuela—and it gathers the people of the nation to its breast to instruct them and teach them to love and defend you … It's your seed, Motherland.… It's your reflection, country of heroes … your glorious reflection. As the years go by, our Army must be the inevitable projection of our country's social, economic, political, and cultural development.

On December 17, 1983, the anniversary of Bolívar's death, Chávez gave a provocative speech that earned him a reprimand from his superiors and was soon followed by the staging of a scene that has become famous in Venezuela: the oath of the Samán de Güere. He urged four of his friends to put on a theatrical performance in which he connected his revolutionary project to the memory of the national hero. Under a very old tree, the Samán de Güere, beneath which, according to legend, Bolívar once sat to rest, he repeated the oath that Bolívar took in 1805, in the presence of his mentor Simón Rodríguez, at Rome's Monte Sacro: "I swear by the God of my fathers, I swear by my country, I swear on my honor, that my soul will not be at peace nor my arm at rest until I see the chains broken that bind us and bind the nation under the powerful." In this way, 1805 became 1983. Chávez changed only two words: instead of "the powerful," Bolívar's oration had made reference only to "Spanish power."

In the military exercises that he led, Chávez ordered his subordinates to begin the day with a thought selected at random from a book of Bolívar's sayings, and he repeated these phrases like quotations from a timeless and all-purpose gospel. His revolutionary movement had the same initials as Bolívar. In the first interview that he gave after his coup, gazing out from prison at the National Pantheon under whose main altar the remains of his hero rest, the Comandante uttered these words: "Bolívar and I led a coup d'état. Bolívar and I want the country to change." Those were not metaphors. The Comandante was speaking in earnest.

Upon leaving prison in 1994, roused by the historic imagery incarnated in him, Chávez threw himself into the political activism that five years later would lead him to the presidency by the electoral route. But something disconcerting began to happen at meetings: an empty chair would be set at the head of the table, and Chávez would sit and stare at it. Only he could hear the voice of his invisible guest, the miraculous participant in his convocations. The empty chair of Bolívar the Liberator became a commonplace in Chávez's delirious universe.

This admiration for Bolívar was genuine, but the management of the myth was cunning and carefully considered. In interviews from the period, Chávez referred to the "mystification" of which "Bolívar the man" was the object. He then proclaimed himself "a revolutionary first and a Bolivarian second." Yet his revolution needed an "ideology," and he needed one, too. "But time is short." What to do? At the very least there had to be an "ideological banner." He found it in his own cult of the hero. The Nicaraguan revolutionaries had adopted the figure of Augusto César Sandino, the legendary nationalist guerrilla of the 1920s. In Mexico, Subcomandante Marcos had recently invoked Emiliano Zapata with great success. But Bolívar meant much more to the nation of Venezuela: he was more than a hero, he was a demigod. Without mincing words, Chávez declared: "If the myth of Bolívar helps to get people and ideas moving, that's good.…"

In Latin America, poets are prophets. In February 1999, when he took office, Chávez quoted a famous line from Pablo Neruda, and made it the linchpin of his address, and built around it the most impressive theological-political performance ever seen in Latin America. In this sermon, an extremely long text larded with Bolívar quotations applied to the present day, full of religious shadings and grandiloquent turns that were extreme even by the permissive standards of Latin American rhetoric, Chávez heralded (in the Christian sense) his arrival in power as something greater than just an electoral or political or even historical triumph. It was still more: a *parousia*, the return to life of the dead and of the nation, the resurrection announced by the apostle Pablo (Neruda): "It is Bolívar coming back to life every hundred years. He awakes every hundred years when the people awake."

Later in the same speech, Chávez returned to the old idea of a primal deicidal guilt, tying it to his country's overwhelming poverty, and decreeing a new historical truth: the republic that was born in 1830 by "betraying the Condor" (another of Bolívar's holy names) had brought down upon itself a curse that lasted nearly 170 years. The complexities of Venezuela's republican past—which, despite wars and dictatorships, had also known periods of true civic freedom and material progress—disappeared completely, tossed out along with the electoral democracy that against all odds had been working quite well since 1959. For Chávez, that "ruinous political model" had to die. And so Venezuela was now contemplating the greatest of miracles—the "return of the Condor," the "resurrection … that is nothing less than the continuation of the social revolution under the bright guiding light of Bolívar."

This was the promulgation of a new Bolívar, a revolutionary Bolívar, even a socialist Bolívar. The first civic rite of this "national re-founding" was a baptism of the nation blessed by the presence of Bolívar incarnate, "our infinite Father," "genius of America," "shining star," "shaper of republics," "truly great hero of our times," "true owner of this process." In dedication to him, Chávez declared, the Republic of Venezuela would add the word "Bolivarian" to its name, and the new constitution would be "based on the doctrine of Bolívar," omniscient, eternal, infallible.

From then on, the ceremonies of the cult of Bolívar—in official propaganda, in the media, in the marketplace—would become increasingly lurid. The Chavista masses would gather in the plazas of Caracas to stage the scene of the oath of the Samán de Güere. They would chant "*Alerta, alerta, alerta*, Bolívar's sword is crossing Latin America! Bolívar lives, Bolívar is alive!" They would hear Bolívar, in a kind of collective parapsychological trance, speaking his opinion across the centuries on every subject: oil, the workers' movement, the social revolution, the virtues of socialism. They would begin to shop for "Bolivarian" plantains and rice, and buy "Bolivarian" chickens, and cut their hair at "Bolivarian" barbershops. "We have boldly sought a new frame of reference," explained Chávez, in interviews he gave in the 1990s. "Original and all our own: Bolivarianism."

Chávez's unquestionable "boldness" has been the subject of a number of anthropological studies that attempt to explain its success. Some anthropologists

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attribute it to the thaumaturgical nature of the Bolivarian cult in certain segments of Venezuelan society. Pino Iturrieta has collected incredible accounts of these secret and magical Bolívars: the Bolívar possessed by the spirit of a supernatural being gifted with powers of healing and salvation, called Yankay; the Bolívar of popular legend, the purported son of a black slave woman from the cocoa plantations; the Bolívar of liberation theology, who died poor and promises redemption for the dispossessed; the syncretistic Bolívar of Venezuela's old African religions, who occupies the center of a "Liberationist Court" presided over by Queen María Lionza, Venezuela's main female saint, worshiped by those who seek love, health, money, luck. In animist ceremonies, the shamans invoke Bolívar to curse "political parties," to bring equality, peace, and liberation, to "bless the neighborhood guerrillas and proclaim a kingdom of happiness ruled by the military."

Imbued with these fantastic strains of popular religiosity, and exploiting them for his cause, Chávez has continued to play the role of magician and thaumaturg, messiah and saint—but his most audacious move was to promote the Bolivarian cult by setting himself in the place of High Priest, in this way availing himself of Bolívar's charisma. In the history of Christianity, Pino Iturrieta found a fitting metaphor for what Chávez accomplished: "Now a tropical Constantine has imposed the complete identification of a people with a national god."

II.

To what political tradition does Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian delirium belong? According to his own version, his destiny was revealed to him around 1977, when he read a book. It was, of all books, *The Role of the Individual in History* by Georgi Plekhanov. He has more than once told the story of his great moment of inspiration, his epiphany before the text: "I read Plekhanov a long time ago, when I belonged to an antiguerrilla unit in the mountains … and it made a deep impression on me. I remember that it was a wonderful starry night in the mountains and I read it in my tent by the light of a flashlight." Again and again he turned to it "in search of ideas [about] the role of the individual in historical processes." He still has in his possession the "little book that survived storms and the years; the same little book with the same little underlinings a person makes, and the same little arrows and the same cover I used as camouflage so that my superiors wouldn't say 'what are you doing reading that?' I read it all over the place, in secret, with a flashlight at night."

"He read everything," said Herma Marksman, his mistress in the 1980s, "but he especially liked the stories of great leaders." The stories—and the theories, too. In an interview in 1995, Chávez remarked that "we men can situate ourselves … in leading roles that speed or slow the process, give it a small personal touch.… But I think that history is the product of the collective being of the people. And I feel myself absolutely given over to that collective being." In colloquial terms, he has often referred to himself as a mere "instrument of the collective being." This is a highly idiosyncratic use of Plekhanov, but with it Chávez crafted his argument for the rule of the caudillo: "If they [the caudillos] develop a real awareness, they become removed from themselves and view the process from a distance. If they devote their lives, their efforts, to use their 'mythical' power to collectivize … then the presence of the caudillo can be justified."

This theory of the individual in history, which is really a theory of the great man in history, explained his admiration for Castro. Although at the time he still wondered whether it was "a curse or a spreading virus" for the historical process to rely on a single man, on his visit to Cuba in 1995 Chávez was deeply moved by the way the people identified with the leader, the "collective" with the caudillo. A woman at a restaurant in the east of the island recognized Chávez and hugged him: "You talked to the chief, you talked to Fidel." For Chávez, "that is the people's message, I get everything I need straight from the people, the people on the street." This "message" that he regards as "all-important" is not the people speaking on behalf of the people, but the people speaking on behalf of the leader. Where was Plekhanov in all this? Chávez had no doubt: it was sufficient for the leader sincerely to declare himself the humble servant of the collective, and for the collective sincerely to accept him as its leader, for "the role of the individual in history" to be fulfilled.

In practice, though, what was the "collective"? Did it have significant parts, or was it a homogeneous whole? And were those parts free to form judgments? Could they disagree with the caudillo? Was there a way of measuring how well the caudillo served the "collective"? Could the "collective" choose another caudillo, or no caudillo at all? These questions did not occur to the ambitious soldier. The important thing was the mystical union of the many and the one, the dissolving of the collective in the leader. That was why it seemed natural and even desirable to Chávez that Castro had "enormous influence over the island": "generations have gotten used to Fidel doing everything. Without Fidel they would be lost. He's everything to them." Castro was an example of the lofty way in which caudillos "are detached from their person, they view the process from a distance and devote their lives to collectivizing through the use of their 'mythical' power." Castro had the historical right to be "everything": he was, after all, a hero—the great hero of Latin America.

Chávez also proposed to "detach himself," in the same way that Castro had detached himself for almost fifty years. For he was a hero, too—maybe not a conquering hero, a triumphant and legendary guerrilla like Fidel, but still a soldier with the heart of a guerrilla. He, too, proposed to "[collectivize] through the use of [his] mythical power": "The body of the nation is in pieces. The hands over here, the legs over there, the head on the other side of the mountains, the body of what we call the collective. Now, to go through life and get something done about putting that body back together, joining the hands to the arms and bringing it to life, giving the people, the collective, an engine, I think that's a life worth living." He had no idea, of course, that with this corporeal metaphor he was reviving one of the oldest conceits of absolute monarchical power. His mistress noted that a "messianic glow" had descended upon her lover. According to another revolutionary friend, Chávez "was convinced that he was carrying out an earthly mission guided by a superhuman force." His faint protests against such grandiosity hardly refuted this notion: "I don't believe in messiahs or caudillos, although people say that's what I am, I don't know whether I am or not, maybe there's a little bit of that in me.… "

President Chávez has been an assiduous reader of Plekhanov, but perhaps not the best reader. I suspect that he does not know much about Plekhanov's place in history. Georgi V. Plekhanov, who was born in Gudalovka, Russia, in 1856 and died in exile in 1918, was considered the father of Russian Marxism. He wrote his book around 1898, during the honeymoon period of his relationship with his disciple Lenin, with whom he edited the journal *Iskra*. Originally a Bakunian populist, Plekhanov fled czarist Russia in 1880, taking refuge in Geneva. He would not set foot on Russian soil again until 1917. It was

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he who coined the term "dialectical materialism." Plekhanov believed that there were immutable laws of history, and he thought that if Russia followed the same trajectory as the countries of Western Europe, it would emerge from feudalism into a state of mature capitalism, which was the necessary condition for its inevitable evolution into the salvific dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1889 he made his first appearance at the Congress of the Second International. In 1895, Lenin traveled to Switzerland to meet him.

Following the lead of Thomas Carlyle, Plekhanov believed in the existence of "great men" as initiators or originators. "This is a very apt description," he wrote. "A great man is precisely a beginner because he sees *further* than others, and desires things *more strongly* than others." In this sense, the great man is a hero "not … in the sense that he can stop, or change, the natural course of things, but in the sense that his activities are the conscious and free expression of this inevitable and unconscious course." The leader is the supreme instrument of history's search for its conclusion. His freedom consists in his ability to choose a course of action in accordance with the fixed laws of historical progress:

> [I]f I know in what direction social relations are changing owing to given changes in the social-economic process of production, I also know in what direction social mentality is changing; consequently, I am able to influence it. Influencing social mentality means influencing historical events. Hence, in a certain sense, *I can make history*, and there is no need for me to wait while "it is being made."

Plekhanov's concept of the "individual's role in history" might have been inspired by Hegel, who in his *Philosophy of History* speaks of "world-historical men." These beings with an essential role in the development of Spirit, these visionary agents of History, are followed by their inferiors, who "feel the irresistible power of their own inner Spirit thus embodied." From this metaphysical-authoritarian premise Hegel concluded that the ordinary rules of ethics were not applicable to great men. "Heroic coercion," he noted in his *Philosophy of Right*, "is justified coercion." The moral equivalence of might and right was also a key doctrine of Carlyle's: "Might and Right," he wrote in 1839, "so frightfully discrepant at first, are ever in the long run one and the same."

Lenin certainly agreed. But Plekhanov did not agree; and this was the irreparable difference between them. Against the backdrop of the Second International in Brussels in 1903, the disagreement between the two grew deeper, and led finally to a break. Lenin assumed absolute leadership of the movement, with the support of the group that would be known as the "Bolsheviks." "This is the cloth from which Robespierres are cut," thundered Plekhanov, who would accuse them of "mistaking the dictatorship of the proletariat for a dictatorship over the proletariat." Shortly afterward he gave up the editorship of *Iskra*, leaving it in Lenin's hands. His final article was a prophetic *j'accuse* titled "Centralism or Bonapartism":

> Let us imagine that the Central Committee, recognized by all of us, had the right, still under consideration, of "liquidation." The following could then occur. A congress is convened, the Central Committee "liquidates" the elements with which it is displeased, selects at the same time the creatures with which it is pleased, and with them makes up all the committees, thus guaranteeing itself without further ado an entirely submissive majority at the congress. The congress composed of the creatures of the Central Committee affably shouts "Hurrah!," approves all its acts, good or bad, and applauds all its projects and initiatives. In such a case, the party would really have neither a majority nor a minority, because we should have put into practice the political ideal of the Shah of Persia.

Over the following years, Plekhanov grew more and more isolated, perplexed by the new phenomenon of absolute power concentrated in a vanguard party, itself commanded by a person beyond appeal, a "Shah of Persia." This phenomenon struck him as contrary to the laws of history. That was why he called Lenin the "alchemist of the revolution" and considered him a "demagogue from head to toe." But such a concentration of power in a leader also seemed to him an assault on the humanist principles of socialism. In *The Role of the Individual in History*, Plekhanov declared that "it is not only for 'initiators,' not only for 'great' men that a broad field of activity is open. It is open for all those who have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to love their neighbours. The concept great is a relative concept. In the ethical sense every man is great who, to use the Biblical phrase, 'lays down his life for his friend.'" Plekhanov did not find this variety of greatness in Lenin.

In the standard manuals of Marxist-Leninist theory, Plekhanov was a wrong-headed dissident. According to Lenin, the attitude of his old ally was "the height of vulgarity and baseness." Outside of that petrified orthodoxy, which lives today only in Cuba, Plekhanov is remembered as the first leading intellectual before Trotsky to warn against the horror of Marxism-Leninism. He supported Kerensky, just months before his death. Of Lenin, he said in his *Political Testament* that "not understanding the true goal of that maximalist fanatic was my greatest mistake."

If Plekhanov had lived until the end of the twentieth century, chances are that his view of Castro would have been exactly the same as his view of Lenin. He would have criticized the caudillo who is "everything" and denounced the Shah of Cuba. The Plekhanov who fought for humanist values, the Plekhanov who refused to subordinate society to its leader and represented the classic Marxist critique of the dictatorial spirit of Lenin and Leninism, is not the Plekhanov whom Comandante Chávez has been reading for thirty years. He may consider himself a Plekhanovist, but Plekhanov, it is certain, would not have been a Chavista. He would have despised the Shah of Venezuela.

And judging by his political writings, Plekhanov's teacher would not have been a Chavista either. In Marx's famous attack on Bonapartism, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, there is an unexpectedly direct connection to President Chávez's epic script. In London, around 1857, Marx received a request from his New York editor, Charles A. Dana, to write an article on Simón Bolívar for *The New American Cyclopaedia*. Although military affairs were Engels's specialty, and although he felt a strong distaste for what he regarded as the backward and barbarous countries of Hispanic America, Marx accepted the assignment. He wrote hastily, with his usual sarcasm, drawing on just a few sources, all hostile to the liberator. The final version of his biographical sketch made Dana uncomfortable, though he published it anyway in 1858.

In Marx's account, Bolívar is pictured as a yokel, a hypocrite, a clod, a womanizer, a traitor, a fickle friend, a wastrel, an aristocrat putting on republican airs, a liar, a climber who surrounded himself with the show of a court and whose few military successes were owed to the Irish and Hannoverian mercenaries whom he hired as advisers. That Marx's animosity toward Bolívar was almost personal is clear. In a letter to Engels he repeats his damning

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conclusions, calling Bolívar "the most dastardly, most miserable and meanest of blackguards," and compares him to Soulouque, the flamboyant Haitian caudillo who in 1852 had himself crowned emperor under the name Faustino I.

Marx's assault on Bolívar has always been a nightmare for the Latin American left. How to explain it? And what to do now that President Chávez has decreed Bolívar a prophet of "twentieth century socialism"? In 2007 a book was published in Caracas called *El Bolívar de Marx*, or *Marx's Bolívar*, which consists of side-by-side texts by serious Venezuelan writers of opposing views—the liberal historian Inés Quintero and the Marxist philosopher Vladimir Acosta, who conduct an elegant debate on the subject of Marx's portrait of Bolívar.

Quintero offers a history of the reception of Marx's text in Latin America, where the left has striven to understand it, to critique it, to play it down. Unfortunately, it has not sufficed to show that Marx's portrait of Bolívar is marred by factual errors, questionable psychological interpretations, sarcastic racist remarks, and hasty judgments. Uncomfortable and disturbing questions have always lingered. The orthodox pro-Soviet faction of the 1930s believed that the text was, of course, untouchable. After Stalin, a weak retraction came from the same Soviet camp: the infallible Marx had erred in this instance, because his sources were limited and biased. By then, several prominent leaders of the Latin American left had attempted to rehabilitate Bolívar for the left. And it was high time: for decades Bolívar had been the almost exclusive idol of the right, which claimed for its cause not only his deeds as liberator but also his growing conviction—amply documented in various acts, declarations, and constitutions (especially the Constitution of Bolivia of 1826, in which he proclaimed himself president for life)—that only dictatorship could bring order to the anarchic, violent, and ungovernable nations of Hispanic America.

Bolívar's dictatorial convictions, which were plain and strong by the last decade of his life, are what Marx condemned him for most vehemently. Between the lines of his piece on Bolívar one hears a clear echo of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "The constitution, the National Assembly, the dynastic parties, the blue and red republicans … the thunder from the platform, the lightning bolts of the daily press, the entire literature, the political names and the intellectual reputations, the civil law and the penal code, *liberté, egalité, fraternité* … all have vanished like a phantasmagoria before the spell of one man…." In his incisive essay on the text, Vladimir Acosta acknowledges this link. He notes also that by condemning Bolívar, Marx launched an assault not only on Bonapartism but also on Hegel. "An inveterate polemicist," says Acosta, "Marx turns his theoretical and political hatred of the Hegelian state and his empirical hatred of the Bonapartism incarnated in Napoleon III into personal hatred of Bolívar."

Hugo Chávez, Fidel Castro, and Simon Bolívar

In Marx's article, there are direct and indirect allusions to Bolívar's authoritarianism. The word "dictatorship" appears in several places. At one point Marx makes scornful reference to Bolívar as the "Napoleon of the retreat." And when he describes Bolívar's activities in Bolivia, the country that would bear his name, Marx writes:

> Here, where Sucre's bayonets were supreme, Bolívar gave full scope to his propensities for arbitrary power, by introducing the "Bolivian Code," an imitation of the Code Napoleon. It was his plan to transplant that code from Bolivia to Peru, and from Peru to Colombia…. What he really aimed at was the erection of the whole of South America into one federative republic, with himself as its dictator … thus giving full scope to his dreams of attaching half a world to his name….

As Quintero documents, this authoritarian side of Bolívar had not just served as an ideological inspiration for the Latin American and Venezuelan right, but also for Italian and Spanish fascism. Both Mussolini and Franco identified themselves with Bolívar's Caesarism. And with their national hero expropriated by such forces of reaction, the Venezuelan left had a great need to rehabilitate him—but given its own authoritarian history, it did not have much to say on this point, and could only continue to cite the errors in the text or its Europeanist slant. Then a new apologetic strategy was found to re-claim the hero under the rubric of Ibero-Americanism, and gradually introduce an anti-imperialist Bolívar. The next step came with the rise to power of Hugo Chávez: "the Return of the Condor."

Up to this point, both Acosta and Quintero honor the empirical truth. But when they refer to the present day, and to the use that Chávez's regime makes of history, their views radically diverge, nicely reflecting the intellectual war that is now tearing Venezuela apart. Acosta explains Marx's reasons for attacking Bolívar, but he does not explain his own reasons for adopting Chávez's Bolivarian narrative. His omission leads him into contradiction. After justifying Bolívar's concentration of power in himself as a wartime imperative, Acosta maintains that historians "on the Right" have denied Bolívar his historicity—and then he immediately goes on to deny Bolívar the same protection by affirming Chávez's appropriation of the liberator. Acosta calls it a way of "rescuing for the people" the "human political greatness and enduring Ibero-American significance of Bolívar." He fails to note the resemblance between his president's "Bolivarian" project and the ahistorical and "sacralizing" perspective for which he takes the "rightists" to task.

In response, Inés Quintero cites a speech by President Chávez in which he scolds those who take Marx's *Capital* as gospel, divorced from its circumstances—

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"you have to realize, kid," said Chávez, "that this was written over there in 18-something … you have to realize that the world has changed"—and thereby exposes the contradiction implicit in the use that Chávez has tried to make of Bolívar as a prophet of twenty-first century socialism. Quintero provides concrete evidence of the "arbitrary, selective, and anachronistic use of Bolívar's discourse, heedless of the circumstances and historic specificity of his life."

This dispute between Acosta and Quintero is not academic. Acosta understands the use that Chávez makes of Bolívar, and defends it. In his rather Hegelian eyes, it is an objective and historic renewal of an old and interrupted process of continental liberation. For Quintero, the scandal is not just the ahistorical, fraudulent, and self-interested use that Chávez makes of Bolívar to justify his own power, but something more subtle: the growing political use to which he is put. "If Bolívar serves to justify the 'socialism of the twenty-first century,' he can just as usefully endorse the end of the democratic transfer of power and the installment of a dictatorial regime, based on the claim that the example and the word of the father of the nation are simply being heeded."

III.

"I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING about Marxism, I never read *El Capital*, I'm not a Marxist or an anti-Marxist," Hugo Chávez said in 1995. He was telling the truth. Chávez was never, in any strict sense, a Marxist, nor was he familiar with the prickly side of Marx, or with his critique of power. Marx criticized the subordination of civil society to a single leader. He criticized the smothering of freedoms and political institutions, the "terrible parasitical organism" of the state, the cult of personality, demagoguery, and plebiscitary rule. And as if that were not enough, he criticized the political use of the past: "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future.… In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury its dead." Point by point, Marx's critique might have been written in response to Chávez's plan for Venezuela.

But if he does not hail from a socialist or Marxist tradition, what are Chávez's ideological and historical origins? Whether he knows it or not, Chávez is the grotesque progeny not of Plekhanov or Marx, but of Thomas Carlyle. It was Carlyle's historical and political doctrine, condensed in 1841 in the series of lectures published as *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, that envisioned and legitimated charismatic power in the twentieth century, the same power that Chávez, for all his outlandishness, represents so skillfully in the twenty-first century. The wishes of his progressive post-Marxist admirers notwithstanding, Chávez comes from a more anachronistic tradition of ideas that does not see history in terms of the struggle of classes or masses, or of races or nations, but of heroes who guide the "people," who incarnate them and redeem them. There is a name for this tradition. It is fascism.

Bolivarian Venezuela and its maximum leader have a number of reasons to recognize themselves in Carlyle, and to forget all of Chávez's nonsense about Plekhanov and Marx. Unlike Marx, Carlyle admired Bolívar. In 1843, lamenting the lack of biographies of "the Washington of Colombia," Carlyle wrote this shining vignette about the national hero:

> Melancholy lithographs represent to us a long-faced square-browed man: of stern, considerate, consciously considerate aspect, mildly aquiline form of nose, with terrible angularity of jaw, and dark deep eyes, somewhat too close together (for which latter circumstance we earnestly hope the lithograph alone is to blame); this is Liberator Bolívar, a man of much hard fighting, hard riding, of manifold achievements, distresses, heroisms and histrionisms in this world; a many-counselled, much-enduring man, now dead and gone; of whom, except that melancholy lithograph, the cultivated European public knows as good as nothing. Yet did he not fly hither and thither, often in the most desperate manner, with wild cavalry clad in blankets, with War of Liberation "to the death"? ….With such cavalry, and artillery and infantry to match, Bolívar has ridden, fighting all the way, through torrid deserts, hot mud-swamps, through ice-chasms beyond the curve of perpetual frost—more miles than Ulysses ever sailed; let the coming Homers take note of it. He has marched over the Andes, more than once, a feat analogous to Hannibal's, and seemed to think little of it. Often beaten, banished from the firm land, he always returned again, truculently fought again. He gained in the Cumana regions the "immortal victory" of Carabobo and several others; under him was gained the finishing "immortal victory" of Ayacucho in Peru, where Old Spain, for the last time, burnt powder in those latitudes and then fled without return. He was Dictator, Liberator, almost Emperor, if he had lived. Some three times over did he in solemn Columbian parliament lay down his Dictatorship with Washington eloquence, and as often, on pressing request, take it up again, being a man indispensable. Thrice, or at least twice, did he, in different places, painfully construct a Free Constitution; consisting of "two chambers, and a supreme governor for life with liberty to name his successor," the reasonablest democratic constitution you could well construct; and twice, or at least once, did the people, on trial, declare it disagreeable. He was, of old, well known in Paris; in the dissolute, the philosophico-political, and other circles there. He has shone in many a gay Parisian soirée, this Simón Bolívar; and in his later years, in autumn 1825, he rode triumphant into Potosi and the fabulous Inca cities, with clouds of feathered Indians somersaulting and war-whooping around him, and "as the famed Cerro, metalliferous Mountain, came in sight, the bells all pealed out, and there was a thunder of artillery," says General Miller. If this is not a Ulysses, Polytlas and Polymetis, a much-enduring and many-counselled man, where was there one? Truly a Ulysses whose history were worth its ink, had the Homer that could do it made his appearance!

This Homeric notion of Bolívar, and the comparison of him to Washington (which Castro curiously reprised in a speech before Chávez), should earn Carlyle a Bolivarian statue in Caracas. But aside from this text on Bolívar, the relevance of Carlyle to the Bolivarian regime, and to the thinking of its maximum leader, lies in the concept of the hero as a central actor in history. Revolutions, Carlyle insisted, require a hero to give new meaning to collective life. On the subject of his transcendent faith in great men (which was inspired by Fichte, who maintained that the "Divine Idea" manifests itself in a few individuals), Carlyle coined his famous phrase: "'Hero-worship' becomes a fact inexpressibly precious; the most solacing fact one sees in the world at present.… No sadder proof can be given by a man of his own littleness than disbelief in great men." And in *Sartor Resartus* he summed up his philosophy of history: "Great Men are the inspired (speaking and acting) Texts of that divine Book of Revelations, whereof a Chapter is completed from epoch to epoch, and by some named History; to which inspired Texts your numerous talented men, and your innumerable untalented men, are the better or worse exegetic Commentaries.…"

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In speech after speech by the maximum leader of the Bolivarian Revolution, the motifs that once represented Bolívar have been used to represent Chávez's greatest hero: himself. Chávez, too, believes in modern Latin American history as a Sacred Text populated by heroes on a holy and urgent mission, for which they are gifted with divine fire. In our time, they were Che and Fidel. Since he was a young man, Chávez has believed that the life story of his country—at least until his arrival, or the "national resurrection"—was Bolívar's life story. And in his self-apotheosizing inaugural address in 1999, one more life story was inscribed in the Sacred Text: his own.

The Comandante has believed all this with a tenacity and a fervor perhaps unprecedented in Latin American political history. In one of his first interviews after he was released from prison, he explained that "at a given moment, we men can situate ourselves in leading roles that speed or slow the process, give it a small personal touch, a distinctive touch. But I think that history is the product of the collective being of the people. And I feel myself absolutely given over to that collective being." So spoke Comandante Chávez in the antechambers of power. His dream was to give "a small personal touch, a distinctive touch" to the revolutionary process.

From the end of the nineteenth century, Carlyle was much quoted in Latin America. The positivist historical schools invoked him to justify the strongmen that the region—supposedly "ungovernable" by means of "Anglo-Saxon" democracy—needed to get ahead. In his famous work, *Democracias latinas de América*, or *Latin Democracies of America*, which appeared in 1900, the Peruvian historian Francisco García Calderón found the heroic key to Latin American political history in Carlyle: he praised the dictators—the Argentinian Rozas, the Mexican Porfirio Díaz, the Ecuadorian García Moreno—and saw them as incarnations of the history of their respective countries. Twenty years later, the Venezuelan sociologist Laureano Vallenilla Lanz published *Cesarismo democrático*, or *Democratic Caesarism*, a celebrated book in which he presented the theory of the "necessary gendarme," with reference to the Venezuelan dictator Juan Vicente Gómez, called "Carlyle's man" by the historian José Gil Fortoul. In the 1920s, another Venezuelan, the poet José Antonio Ramos Sucre, presented the Carlylean cult of the hero—indeed, the military hero—together with the cult of Bolívar.

But in the 1930s a new political dimension was added to the cult of the hero. It was Jorge Luis Borges who discovered a troubling key to Latin America in Carlyle. In 1917, as a young man, Borges learned German, inspired by Carlyle's Germanophilia. More than thirty years later, re-reading the last lecture in *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, he noted that "Carlyle reasons like a South American dictator in his defense of the dissolution of the English parliament by Cromwell's musketeers." Borges was referring to the passage in which Carlyle describes how, in 1653, after the beheading of King Charles I, the Puritan revolutionary Oliver Cromwell—Carlyle's favorite hero—loses patience with Parliament, made up of "blind pedants" with their "constitution-formulas" and "right of Election," and finally dissolves it to become, with the "power of God," the Lord Protector of England.

Borges read Carlyle with Latin American eyes, detecting Cromwell's resemblance to our anti-democratic prototypes: caudillos, revolutionaries, dictators. What is so remarkable is that the connection that Borges observed has its flipside in reality: Carlyle was himself inspired by Latin America. In the years in which he compiled the unpublished speeches of Cromwell, Carlyle bemoaned the fact that the nineteenth century had not produced a leader like that "great, earnest, sincere soul who always prayed before his great undertakings." "Our age shouted itself hoarse," Carlyle wrote, "bringing about confusion and catastrophe because no great man did heed our call." Then suddenly, around 1843, Carlyle stopped shouting himself hoarse, because he discovered by chance, in a remote South American country, a "hero" worthy of the name, a "savior of his age" a "phoenix of resurrection": José Gaspar Rodríguez Francia, the dictator of Paraguay.

The stirring example of Francia struck him so forcefully that he interrupted his work to undertake—based on a few reports by German travelers—the biography of that "one veracious man." Carlyle wrote just one biography of a contemporary: that of Doctor Francia. He called him the "Cromwell of South America," a "man sent by Heaven," a "fierce condor." He admired his firm and spiritual rule, his "Divine Offices in Paraguay," his severity, his scorn for the intellectual forms and political institutions of eighteenth-century rationalism: "Tawny-visaged, lean, inexorable Dr. Francia; claps you an embargo on all that [ballot boxes, registration courts, bursts of parliamentary eloquence]; says to constitutional liberty, in the most tyrannous manner, Hitherto, and no farther." Above all, Carlyle applauded the tyrant's desire to perpetuate himself: "My lease of Paraguay … is for life," Francia had said. Through him, Carlyle declared, "Oliver Cromwell, dead two-hundred years … now first begins to speak." A South American dictator had given Carlyle new faith in the present and future possibility of heroes.

In Carlyle's historical theology, Borges thought that he had found Carlyle's legacy to the twentieth century: a political theory that led men to prostrate themselves before the "God-intoxicated," before those beings "inspired" by God, before the "kings" by natural law, because they embodied the only hope of a new reality that could do away with the surrounding "shams." From the presumption that the hero is not just another leading player or a consequence of history but its cause, Borges extracted a political corollary: "once the divine mission of the hero has been postulated, it is inevitable that we judge him (and that he judge himself) free of human obligations.… It is also inevitable that every political adventurer believe himself a hero and that he reason that his excesses are irrefutable proof that he is one."

The date of Borges's text on Carlyle, a prologue to a translation of *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*, is significant: it was written in 1949. Four years after the end of World War II, Carlyle's theory seemed at last to divulge its ultimate meaning: "his contemporaries did not understand it," Borges wrote, "but now it may be summed up in a single household word: Nazism." And Borges was not alone in this observation. The same conclusion was reached by Chesterton, in *The End of the Armistice*, and by Russell, in "The Ancestry of Fascism," among others. (In 1981, Hugh Trevor-Roper also took up the argument in an essay on Carlyle's thought.) For Borges, not only Germany but also Russia and Italy had "drunk to the dregs" the "universal panacea" that he

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characterized as the "unconditional surrender of power to strong and silent men." Correcting only for the fact that Evita—like Chávez, who erected a statue to her—was not exactly silent, Borges might have been able to add to his Carlylean list the Argentina of Perón. By 1949, though, he confessed that his love for the hero had become a deep hatred. The results of dictatorship, fascist or populist, were the same: "servility, fear, brutality, mental indigence, and treachery."

In his cult of Bolívar, at once sincere and calculated, and in his idolatry of history, Comandante Chávez is part of this intellectual lineage. In his political theology and in his political action, he is Carlyle's bloated and buffoonish son. The protagonist of his regime is not at all "the collective." As is evident to everyone in every corner of Venezuela, the protagonist of his regime is the "hero," the man himself, Hugo Chávez.

IV.

Is Chávez, then, a classical fascist? Even before he assumed power, Chávez defended the need for a charismatic leader: "The caudillo is the representative of a mass group with which he identifies, and he is recognized by that group without any formal or legal legitimizing process." And "this can only be called a revolution," he said in his inaugural address. As "a revolutionary first and a Bolivarian second," he preached the need to wipe clean the slate of the past from the time of Bolívar's death to his own rise, and he equated military dictatorship with "stinking democracy." For him, all of Venezuela's military regimes before his own were "essentially the same" as the democratic governments of Rómulo Betancourt or Rafael Caldera: on horseback or in a Mercedes Benz, they all represented "the same prevailing economic and political thinking, the same denial of the people's right to take the leading role in their destiny." The revolution that he stood for would bury the "ruinous political model … of the last forty years" and put the people back in charge of their fate. And how would they take charge of it? In the person of the leader, of course.

Those were the "bad" militaries. He represented the "good" ones. Nearly as important to Chávez as his revolutionary faith in a caudillo has been the matter of his military identity: "Our movement was born in the barracks. That's a factor we can never forget, it was born there and its roots are there." From the beginning it was clear that he adored military parades, and that he regarded the country and the society as military structures, orderly and hierarchical. As for the political value of myth, symbol, and ritual: "If the Bolívar myth helps to quicken people and ideas in accordance with a revolutionary process, well, the process will tell, because if [the myth] is good for anything, it should be for the transformation of a people, not their exploitation." The theological-political staging of the Bolivarian "resurrection" has been the ongoing spectacle of his rule, from his rise to power until the present day.

On the subject of liberal democracy, his opinions have always been sweeping: "Liberal democracy is no good, its time has passed, new models must be invented, new formulas.… Democracy is like a rotten mango: it has to be taken as seed and sowed." Regarding the opposition parties represented in parliament, Chávez went so far as to exclaim, at a rally before he was first elected, that "we, you and I, are going to roll the [social-democratic opposition] up in a giant ball of … I can't say what because it's rude." And the crowd responded: "Of shit!" Years later he would declare that "the opposition will never return to power, by fair means or foul." On his visit to Cuba in 1999, he suggested that his presidency would last "twenty to forty years." And among the sixty-nine articles of his constitutional reform rejected by plebiscite in 2007 was the possibility of indefinite re-election, ensuring that his lease over Venezuela would be for life. Now, with the recent referendum, which many constitutional lawyers thought illegal, he may have achieved this tyrannical goal.

In devising his Bolivarian ideology, Chávez might not have read Carlyle, but he certainly read his "great friend," the Argentinian sociologist Norberto Ceresole. He met Ceresole after he was released from prison, traveled with him around Venezuela, and for many years the professor was a close advisor. Ceresole, who was born in 1943 and died in 2003, moved easily between the Soviet left and the neo-Nazi right. He was an advisor to Juan Velasco Alvarado; a member of the Montoneros, a Peronist guerrilla group; a spokesman for Perón during his exile in Madrid; a leader of the Carapintadas, an ultra-right military movement; a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and a professor at the Soviet Military Academy; a representative of Hezbollah in Madrid; a neo-Nazi militant and a vociferous Holocaust denier. Ceresole was the author of several books of geopolitics explicitly inspired by the Nazi general Karl Haushofer. And this brings us to another element of classical fascism that Hugo Chávez has not hesitated to exploit: anti-Semitism.

In his book *Terrorismo fundamentalista judío*, or *Jewish Fundamentalist Terrorism*, which was published in 1996, while he was associated with Chávez, Ceresole revived the theory of an international Jewish conspiracy actively set on seizing control of Latin America. Ceresole predicted that war would break out between Iran and the Washington-London-Tel Aviv axis. Unable to fight the battle alone, Iran would call to its aid a "large and powerful State" which "of course will be the German State." Then "Berlin will rise from its ashes and we will see the Phoenix soar." In its final apotheosis, Chávez's friend and favored intellectual predicted, the "German Empire" will ally itself with Russia, Japan, and the Muslim world. And in this replay of World War II, Latin America would free itself of the traditional historical encumbrance of "Anglo-America," and of its secret encumbrance, the "globalizing Jews" who have infiltrated the political structures of the region. Backed by "Eurasia," Latin America would expand its *Lebensraum* with a supranational army. (In 1995, Chávez declared that "we are studying the whole approach that Norberto Ceresole sets out in his studies and work.")

Chávez's mentor Ceresole would have been pleased by the invocation of a fascist lineage for his Comandante. In his work *Caudillo, ejército, pueblo: La Venezuela del Comandante Chávez*, or *The Caudillo, the Army and the People: The Venezuela of Comandante Chávez*, which was published in 1999, Ceresole wrote:

> In Venezuela, the change will be channeled through one man, one "physical person," not an abstract idea or a party.… The people of Venezuela created a caudillo. The nucleus of power today lies precisely in the relationship established between the leader and the masses. The unique and differential nature of the Venezuelan process cannot be distorted or misinterpreted. What we have here is a people issuing an order to a chief, a caudillo, a military leader.

This prophet of the "German Phoenix" and enemy of the infamous "Jews" Karl Marx and Adam Smith would have been untroubled by another feature of Chávez's dictatorial rule: the persecution of the Jewish community of Venezuela. In the Chávez years, and most nastily in recent months, the Venezuelan Jewish community has been the scapegoat of the theories that Chávez absorbed from Ceresole. Its schools and its institutions have been repeatedly raided by the police, and its members have been harassed by Chavista

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television, radio, press, Internet sites, and even by the President himself. The Jews of Venezuela have been denounced as the instigators of the coup attempt against Chávez in 2002. The theory of a "worldwide Jewish conspiracy" has become a commonplace in Venezuela. In the weeks leading up to the recent referendum, the old Maripérez Synagogue in Caracas was violently assaulted; the building was defaced and the computers that store information on the Jewish community of Venezuela were stolen. It is no coincidence that the Islamic Republic of Iran has found a staunch ally in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. It is also no coincidence that in the Chávez years nearly 25 percent of the Jewish community—fifteen thousand people—should have decided to emigrate.

V.

"The history of the world," wrote Carlyle, "is but the biography of great men." "The history of Venezuela," Comandante Chávez suggested in 1999, "was the biography of Bolívar," as interpreted by his prophet on earth, Hugo Chávez. Ten years later, the Comandante might say that the history of Venezuela is but his own biography, the biography of Hugo Chávez.

Chávez's omnipotence is owed to his omnipresence. (The two qualities are often linked in deities.) Just watch him any Sunday on his show "*Aló presidente*"—its minimum duration is five hours—live from the palace of Miraflores. Presiding over his silent, acquiescent ministers, all dressed in red, the Comandante tells stories from his life, and yammers on about romantic adventures, gastric ailments, baseball games; he also sings, dances, recites, prays, laughs. In these sessions Chávez dictates electoral strategies, huge transfers of fiscal resources, petroleum subsidies, social initiatives, troop movements, diplomatic ruptures, business expropriations, cabinet changes. All of this has struck some American journalists—and movie people, such as Oliver Stone and Sean Penn—as folksy and authentic and even patriotic.

Chávez does not act like the president of Venezuela; he acts like its owner. He is the proprietor of his public office, the CEO of state enterprises that answer to no laws of transparency and accountability, the big and indiscriminate spender of oil revenues (between 1999 and 2008 he spent, on average, $122 million per day), the supreme leader of a Legislative Assembly and Tribunal of Justice that is supposed to serve as a check and a balance, the head of an attorney general's office that is supposed to oversee his actions, the comptroller of electoral organs that are supposed to be autonomous, the caudillo of official candidates who have no other ideology than his strange "twenty-first-century socialism" and no other loyalty than that which they owe him personally. But above all Chávez is the commander-in-chief of a media campaign that, in his mind, is the equivalent of a great and interminable military battle. Those who are not with him are "against Venezuela," are "imperialists," "*pitiyanquis*" (little Yankees), "filth."

Bolívar wanted to be president for life, but he declined the throne. He was present at the coronation of Napoleon, watched his rise and fall, and always detested monarchies. Chávez, by contrast, acts like a patrimonialist monarch. He has distributed posts, privileges, and money to his family. He has capriciously disposed of billions of dollars. He has headed a continental movement controlling—through the supply of oil at preferential prices and conditions—a number of Latin American countries (Bolivia, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Honduras, and Ecuador a bit less, and probably soon El Salvador) that now behave like his vice-royalties. He has dreamed of forging, along with his "Iranian and Arab brothers," the new hegemonic power of his time. And his kingdom is not only of this world: "Christ was communist," he has said repeatedly, to taunt the Catholic Church and the evangelical community.

How has this coarse megalomaniac managed to bestride the globe? His defenders explain it by the success of his social programs and the economic growth of recent years, noting the corruption of the regimes that preceded him and arguing that Chávez was democratically elected, which gives him a mandate that legitimates all his actions. And the social programs implemented through the different "missions" (subsidized food, free medical assistance, literacy training, and education) did in fact have a strong period of growth between 2004 and 2006. But by 2007 they were in decline, and their loss of credibility was perceptible: empty shelves in stores as well as problems of supply, staff, and quality in both medical and educational services. Wanting to bypass the state in his social and political outreach, Chávez made an inefficient, corrupt, and dependent bureaucratic monster of PDVSA, the oil company that in its day was world-class, and the ultimate result was the weakening of formal institutions before new ones could be consolidated.

The growth of per capita income in Venezuela—14.6 percent between 1999 and 2006—was attributable to oil revenues, but since 2007 income has fallen substantially due to inflation, which reached 31 percent in 2008 and was the second highest in the world after Zimbabwe. As for corruption, its magnitude is hard to measure given the system's total opacity. But there is external evidence: based on numbers from the Central Bank of Venezuela itself, of the $22.5 billion that left the country between 2004 and 2008, $12 billion were never accounted for. Something similar happened at PDVSA, with $5 billion vanishing in 2005. On the Corruption Perceptions Index released in 2008 by Transparency International, Venezuela was rated 158 out of 180.

The Chavista project—the unprecedented increase in public employment, the transfer of resources to allied countries, whether as direct handouts or oil-bill subsidies, the expropriation of strategic assets such as electricity, telecommunications, iron and steel, aluminum and cement—went hand in hand with the deliberate exclusion of private enterprise, which, unsurprisingly, reduced investment to historic lows. But the effect of this weakening of the means of production was postponed because the gap in supply was filled by unparalleled imports of consumer goods. Meanwhile PDVSA, stripped since 2003 of one-third of its professional workforce, saw its production and exports fall in 2008 by 34 percent and 50 percent, respectively. What was propping up the edifice? A single brick: the price of a barrel. Venezuela was immersed in the magical realism of an economy that produced less and consumed more, thanks to the exponential increase in oil prices, which between 2002 and 2008 went up by a multiple of seven, from $20 to $140 per barrel. In mid-2008, Chávez's ministers considered it "impossible" for the price to come down for the time being. The Comandante boasted that he could take the price to $250. He could do anything.

The price of oil supported this fiction until a few months ago. But the key to Chávez's enthronement lies not in his erratic record of economic development or in the arguable success of his social programs, but in the press's handling of his colossal persona. His takeover of the Bolívar myth is complete. All the fantastic strains of popular religiosity in Venezuela, its folk political theology, are now centered in him. Of course, demigods do not share power. That is why, from the moment he became president by the electoral route, Chávez has used democracy

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to undermine democracy. After achieving the unconditional subordination of all the constitutional powers, he has taken numerous measures to undermine all independent sources of power and to crush the opposition.

After the recall referendum in 2004, he introduced what the distinguished left-wing journalist Teodoro Petkoff has called "political apartheid"—job discrimination against, and the political harassment of, more than 2.3 million people who voted against him. In May 2007 he closed down RCTV, the main independent TV station. In 2008, he disqualified hundreds of possible opposition candidates from mayoral and gubernatorial elections. After the opposition's surprising gains in those elections, and knowing that the global economic crisis would soon reach Venezuela, Chávez decided to bet everything on another referendum, which was contrived to legalize the possibility of running an unlimited number of times for the office of president. The electoral process that culminated in the vote on February 15, like all such ballots since Chávez has been in office, was thoroughly unequal. On one side was the opposition, without economic resources, exhausted after years of intense protests; and, on the other side, Chávez, with all the economic and propagandistic power of the state and hundreds of thousands of state employees working illegally for his cause. In the weeks leading up to the vote, the abuse of power was not hidden. Indeed, the government seemed to have an interest in flaunting it as an instrument of intimidation. Having closed, harassed, or fined the few media outlets that opposed him, Chávez devoted the impressive media network that he has assembled (three hundred radio stations, subsidized papers, five TV stations in the capital alone) to relentless propaganda for him and his regime. The opposition, barred from these outlets and slandered in them, was left with only a single television station and another cable station (which Chávez in all likelihood will soon shut down). Public employees passed out flyers in favor of the president's perpetual re-election: "Chávez loves us, and you pay love back with love."

Chávez won the referendum. Finally he got what he wanted. Now, like Doctor Francia and Doctor Castro, "his lease of Venezuela can be for life." But will it be? The grip of great men on history is never as firm as fascism teaches them to believe. The first limit on Chávez's perpetuity will be economic. The bad news from the real world has reached his kingdom of fantasy. In 2009, the revenue from oil exports may be less than one-third of what it was in 2008. The government will be able to postpone the inevitable reduction in spending for a few months by dipping into the country's international reserves, but the sharpness of the fall will make a significant reduction in spending inevitable. Personal income will shrink significantly, eroded by galloping inflation. A possible way out would be the restoration of private business activity, but the country no longer has at its disposal that dynamic engine of growth, since it became dependent as never before on revenue that was thought to be inexhaustible. Public employees and recipients of direct benefits through the missions will see their buying power wane. The client-citizen base will lose its reason to believe. Supporters will remain loyal only for ideological reasons, or out of fear of losing the little they have. And on the international stage, fair-weather allies, won over by multimillion-dollar handouts, will distance themselves from Chávez as the money dries up.

The second limit on Chávez's ambition lies in the opposition. There is an active and vibrant civil society in Venezuela. Six million people voted for Chávez, split between loyalists and client-citizens; but five million abstained, and another five million voted against him. These are the results of a still perdurable institutional and legal democratic framework that was several generations in the making. The opposition is a dissident mass made up of elements from a wide social spectrum: workers, housewives, union leaders, small- and medium-size business owners, intellectuals, academics, artists, writers, priests, journalists, and a significant segment of the poor. Students in particular have been in the vanguard of this fight. For them, the idea that this caudillo will govern their children and grandchildren is unthinkable.

The third factor that may hurt Chávez is regional geopolitics. A few days before the recent referendum, Fidel Castro—the "father of Chávez"—compared Chávez to Bolívar and spoke of the "return of the Condor." But Raúl Castro, Chávez's "uncle," may not concur with such a heroic interpretation of his "nephew." The establishment of friendly relations between Cuba, Brazil, and Chile, leading to the thawing of Cuba's relations with the United States (including, of course, the urgent lifting of the embargo), would isolate Chávez. In such circumstances, his approach to power would seem increasingly solipsistic and anachronistic.

But finally Chávez will most likely be brought down by himself. Faced with the economic crisis, and the pressure from the opposition, and the hostile geopolitical context, will he harden his policies and radicalize his positions, or will he come to his senses? What seems most likely, I think, is that he will move toward a Cuban model, with Iran playing the role of the Soviet Union. If Bolívar was the hero of the nineteenth century and Castro of the twentieth, Chávez will seek the same glory in the twenty-first. He will let tensions build to the breaking point. He will, as some socialists use to say, sharpen the contradictions. And then Venezuela, as so many times in its history, will be plunged into blood. ◆

Ruth Franklin
NIGHT AND COG

THE KINDLY ONES
By Jonathan Littell
Translated by Charlotte Mandell
(Harper, 984 pp., $29.99)

The Kindly Ones has all the trappings of a Very Important Novel. It is a doorstop: 975 pages (plus appendices) in its English translation, heroically accomplished by Charlotte Mandell. Its cover heralds it as an "international best-seller" (although this cynical American suspects that only in Europe can a book of such bulk and pretension sell nearly a million copies). Its author, Jonathan Littell, has a cool cosmopolitan c.v.: born in America, he wrote the novel in French, his second language, and currently lives in Barcelona. It bears a heavy thematic framework, mainly allusions to the ancient Greeks: "the kindly ones" are the Eumenides, better known as the Furies. And did I mention that it is narrated by a Nazi?

But *The Kindly Ones* is not an important novel, because it fails absolutely to add anything of significance to our understanding of its subject, which is nothing less than the most perplexing question of modernity. How could human beings undertake—and successfully carry out—

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an unprecedented systematic program of mass extermination against other human beings? Over the course of the sixty-four years since the end of World War II, this question has been examined energetically, if not exhaustively, by historians, philosophers, novelists, poets, psychologists, and politicians. In her seminal account of the Eichmann trial, Hannah Arendt set the terms of the debate by arguing that the majority of the Nazis were not—as psychologists had previously believed—monsters in some form: sadists, psychopaths, perverts, or homicidal maniacs. They were, the overwhelming majority of them, unremarkable men, "small cogs" in a killing machine, who showed little initiative of their own but were prepared to obey orders unquestioningly and then go to dinner.

The question of the psychological and even spiritual identity of the perpetrators is not an academic one. It had important implications in the debate that played out for decades in courtrooms across Europe as prosecutors attempted to bring the Nazis to justice. From the start, it was obvious that not all of those who participated in the "Final Solution" could stand trial: there were too many of them. At the same time, the deaths of millions of Europe's citizens could not go unpunished. Someone had to be held responsible. So which Nazis were the most guilty—and what exactly were they guilty of? In the years immediately following the war, many of the highest-ranking Nazi satraps—among them Göring, Kaltenbrunner, Bormann—were convicted of war crimes, at Nuremberg and elsewhere, and sentenced to death. But it was much less clear what should be done with the multitude of mid-level functionaries, the "small cogs." They were in no way architects of the genocide, but the system could not have functioned without them. How evil, precisely, were they?

The narrator of *The Kindly Ones* is a cog. He is Maximilien Aue, a Nazi functionary, who joins the Nazi party early on as an act of rebellion against his French mother and stepfather and eventually rises to the rank of SS-Obersturmbannführer, or lieutenant colonel. Along the way he serves with the Einsatzgruppen in Ukraine, on the eastern front in the Battle of Stalingrad, and finally in an office job in Berlin as the head of the Arbeitseinsatz, the office that manages the "work force"—the able-bodied Jews and other prisoners culled from the mass deportations from all over Europe. During the fall of Berlin, he tells us at the novel's start, he escaped into France with false papers; and now, writing his memoirs in his old age, he still lives peacefully there, working in a lace-making factory.

The deep discomfort of the book begins with its first lines, as Aue, in an opening section that reads as a sort of apologia without apology ("I do not regret anything"), insists that he is an ordinary man. "I am a man like other men, I am a man like you. I tell you I am just like you!" (This kind of pointless redundancy goes a long way toward explaining the book's bulk. Aue is a garrulous cog.) He does not mean this to exonerate himself: he understands the word "ordinary" in an Arendtian sense. "The ordinary men that make up the State—especially in unstable times—now there's the real danger," he says. "The real danger for mankind is me, is you." Aue does not plead ignorance of the circumstances—he was fully informed about the "Jewish question," and visited Auschwitz more than once when the exterminations were taking place—or blind obeisance to authority. He committed his crimes, he says, for ideological reasons, and therefore in good faith: "What I did, I did with my eyes open, believing that it was my duty and that it had to be done, disagreeable or unpleasant as it may have been."

So what exactly did he do? Well, after war breaks out in Poland, Aue, at the encouragement of his friend Thomas, signs up to work with the Einsatzgruppen, or mobile death squads, in Ukraine. (Back then, he thought the "work" would consist of "the security of the troops in the rear, intelligence, things like that.... What man of sane mind could ever have imagined that they'd pick jurists to assassinate people without a trial?") In those early days, the German army had not yet reached the pinnacle of efficiency that would later characterize its machinery of slaughter. Aue initially takes a matter-of-fact attitude toward the massacres: "Certainly there would be mistakes; certainly there would be innocent victims; but that, alas, was war; when you bomb a city, civilians die also." But he is soon appalled by the undisciplined violence. In Lemberg (Lviv), a priest begs him to keep locals from killing Jews in the courtyard of his church. He meets another officer who is supposed to serve as an expert on "Ukrainian national questions," but is actually a professor of theology. The first coordinated *Aktion* against Jews that he witnesses has a gruesome comedy. Once they get the Jews to the forest, there is nowhere to dig a trench, because the forest is already full of mass graves.

At his first sight of mass murder—a thousand corpses piled up in the courtyard of an old castle—Aue has a natural human reaction: he is appalled. "I wanted to close my eyes, or put my hand over my eyes," he recalls, "and at the same time I wanted to look, to look as much as I could, and by looking, try to understand, this incomprehensible thing, there, in front of me, this void for human thought." But his desire to understand does not go so far as empathy, and anyway it quickly disappears. In one of the scenes of mass execution, Aue pauses to wonder what the Ukrainians drafted to serve as shooters must be thinking, "wearing a strange uniform and killing people who had done nothing to them." But he has not a speck of sympathy for the doomed Jews, not a single question about what the victims might have thought or felt. The closest Aue comes is when he finds a little girl who had somehow escaped the trench wandering nearby. "Where is mama?" he asks her in Ukrainian. She points to the trench. He takes her by the hand and leads her to a Waffen-SS, with the parting words: "Be gentle with her."

The novel is careful to show that Aue, unlike some of his comrades in the SS, is no raging anti-Semite. (Littell seems to subscribe to the much-debatable theory that the anti-Semites among the SS were the exceptions.) Aue bears no personal animus against the Jews; he does what he does because he believes in the Nazi party and the German nation. In fact, he is enough of an independent thinker to realize that Hitler's Jewish obsession may distract Germany from realizing its goals. "The murder of the Jews doesn't serve any real purpose," he complains to Thomas one night in Ukraine. "It has no economic or political usefulness, it has no finality of a practical order.... It's a waste, pure loss." A consummate SS-man, Aue regards "waste" as the worst sin.

Dispatched to the Caucasus to resolve whether a tiny ancient sect known as the *Bergjuden*, or Mountain Jews, are "racially" Jewish or not, Aue applies himself strenuously and objectively to researching the question, interviewing the Jews themselves and various experts. In this he starkly contrasts with a specialist sent to work with him, a female Nazi who offends him with her aggressive ideology and crude language. When the Jewish villagers shower them with gifts and hospitality, she scoffs at their attempts

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to buy her off: "That's really a Jewish tactic." In comparison, he seems like some sort of idealist.

Aue's idealism eventually works to his disadvantage, by blinding him to the obvious goal of the deportations and the concentration camps. Despite everything he knows, he simply cannot believe that their true purpose is to exterminate all the Jews—not when Germany is so desperately in need of a work force. And there are others who share his naïveté. "I train specialists, they take them away from me and they disappear God knows where," a supervisor in Lublin tells him. "I ask for better food for the workers; they tell me there is no extra food for Jews. I ask them at least to stop beating them all the time; they give me to understand that I shouldn't interfere in what isn't my business. How is anyone supposed to work properly in such conditions?" But for the most part Aue's work at the *Arbeitseinsatz* forces him to butt heads with other bureaucrats in his helplessly un-ideological insistence on better treatment for the prisoners.

At Auschwitz, Aue receives a personal tour of the camp from Rudolf Höss, and witnesses the arrival of a transport of French Jews. The scene is familiar, though the perspective is not:

> The train was brought up and the doors of the cattle cars were opened. I expected a chaotic outburst: despite the shouts and the barking of the dogs, things happened in a relatively orderly way. The newcomers, obviously disoriented and exhausted, poured out of the cars in the midst of an abominable stink of excrement; the *Häftlinge* of the work Kommando, shouting in a mixture of Polish, Yiddish, and German, made them abandon their luggage and line up in rows.… A woman, seeing me, asked me, in bad German, pointing to her child: "Herr Offizier! Can we stay together?"—"Don't worry, Madame," I replied politely in French, "you won't be separated."

Of the one thousand Jews in the transport, 369 men and 191 women are "kept"—55 percent. "With the convoys from the West, we get good averages," the doctor in charge tells him. "But the Polish convoys are a disaster. It never goes beyond twenty-five percent, and sometimes, aside from two or three percent, there's really nothing to keep.… Their condition on arrival is deplorable." Later Aue interviews chief physician Eduard Wirths, another "idealist" for whom the idea of selection is "odious … but if it has to be done, then it might as well be done by doctors." As a matter of principle, he makes all the camp doctors take a turn at the ramp: "'I myself go there too, even if I find it horrifying. I have to set an example.' He looked a little lost as he said that."

The problem with the labor force is particularly obvious at the factory run by I.G. Farben on the camp's grounds, known as Buna. An engineer named Schenke reports to Aue that the construction of the factory is going slowly because the inmates working on it are in such poor shape; the company's contract allows them to send the inmates back and demand new ones, but the replacements are never any better. "What happens to the ones you send back?" Aue asks him. Schenke responds: "I have no idea. That's not my business. I guess they fix them up in the hospital. Don't you know?" But Aue cannot help but notice how brutally the prisoners are treated:

> In the midst of the immense, muddy construction site that was to become the factory, columns of scrawny *Häftlinge* in rags carried at a run, under the shouts and cudgel blows of the kapos, beams or bags of cement far too heavy for them. If a worker, in his big wooden clogs, stumbled and let his load fall, or collapsed himself, the blows redoubled, and blood, fresh and red, gushed onto the oily mud. Some never got up again. The din was infernal, everyone was yelling, the SS noncoms, the kapos; the beaten inmates screamed pitifully. Schenke guided me through the Gehenna without paying the slightest attention to it. Here and there, he paused and conversed with other engineers in well-pressed suits, holding yellow folding rulers and little fake-leather notebooks in which they jotted down figures. They commented on the progress of the construction of a wall, then one of them muttered a few words to a Rottenführer, who began to yell and viciously hit the kapo with his boot or rifle butt; the kapo, in turn, dove into the mass of inmates, distributing savage blows with full force, bellowing; and then the *Häftlinge* attempted a surge of activity, which died down on its own, since they could scarcely stand up. This system seemed to me extremely inefficient, and I said as much to Schenke; he shrugged his shoulders and looked around him as if he were seeing the scene for the first time: "In any case they don't understand anything but blows. What else can you do with such a workforce?"

When Aue suggests that they could obtain better output by treating the prisoners more humanely, Schenke insists that the camp, not the company, is responsible for their upkeep: "All that is specified in our contract." These bureaucratic barriers allow I.G. Farben essentially to exculpate itself. And yet Littell demonstrates (though we knew this already) that an unquantifiable amount of moral blindness is required to allow them to turn their heads. Behind Schenke, Aue notices, "knocked down by a cudgel, an inmate was dying; his bloody head was buried in the thick mud; only the mechanical trembling of his legs showed that he was still alive. Schenke, as we left, stepped over him without looking at him. He was still thinking about my words with irritation: 'We can't have a sentimental attitude, Herr Sturmbahnführer. We are at war. Production counts above all else.'—'I'm not saying otherwise. My objective is just to suggest ways to increase production.'" Extremely inefficient, indeed.

The accomplishment of Littell's book is its convincing depiction of the Nazi state as a gigantic machine, which sometimes worked well and sometimes poorly, but which was dependent at every stage on hundreds of thousands of people, from janitors to high-ranking functionaries, to keep it operational. Aue does not even meet Hitler until page 959, and then only for a brief (possibly hallucinated) scene. The Führer's presence is not required: set in motion by his deputies and maintained by layer upon layer of cogs, the machine functions on its own. Littell shows this vividly, though his take is hardly original. (Arendt wrote that "if this meant no more than giving unquestioning obedience to the Führer's orders, then they had all been small cogs—even Himmler, we are told by his masseur, Felix Kersten, had not greeted the Final Solution with great enthusiasm.")

The cogs, Littell also makes clear, are not just the Nazis and the corporations that collaborated with them, but also the bystanders. It was impossible for the average German not to have had some idea of what was being done in his name. "It's remarkable how well informed people are of the so-called secrets—the euthanasia program, the destruction of the Jews, the camps in Poland, the gas, everything," Thomas tells Aue after his return to Berlin. "You, in Russia, had never heard of the KLs [concentration camps] in Lublin or Silesia, but the lowliest tramcar driver in Berlin or Düsseldorf knows they're burning prisoners there." On his tour of the Polish concentration camps, Aue is sur-

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prised to see a little camp in southeastern Poland set up not in an uninhabited area, as he had believed all the camps were, but "right next to a little town swarming with German settlers and their families; the main railroad linking Galicia to the rest of the GG [Generalgouvernement], on which civilians and soldiers traveled daily, passed right by the barbed wire, through the horrible smell and the smoke: and all these people, trading, traveling, scurrying in one direction or another, chatted, argued, wrote letters, spread rumors, told jokes." On his last visit to Auschwitz, he travels in a regular train filled with civilians and functionaries. "Well before the station, to the left of the train, you could see a line of points of white light, the barbed-wire spotlights perched on whitewashed poles, and behind that line, more darkness, an abyss giving off that abominable stench of burned flesh, which wafted through the car. The passengers … crowded around the windows, often with their wives. Comments flew: 'It's burning nicely,' a civilian said to his wife."

So, are the cogs guilty? Should they be held responsible for the atrocities committed on their behalf? On this question—a question absolutely essential to the way we understand Nazi guilt and retribution, and to our understanding of genocide more generally—Littell's book is maddeningly incoherent. From the outset, Aue makes it clear that he believes the cogs should be held responsible: he does not identify gradations of guilt. "Who is guilty? Everyone, or no one?" he asks. "Why should the worker assigned to the gas chamber be guiltier than the worker assigned to the boilers, the garden, the vehicles?" All are equally guilty. But such logic fails to recognize that some roles are essential (the person who turns on the gas), while others are not (the person who weeds the garden). And why is the architect of the program absent from the list?

In interviews Littell has pushed this point further, explaining that for him, as for Aue, it is the deed that matters, not the intent—always so fuzzy—behind it:

> The influence of Greek thought on the book extends far beyond its Aeschylean structure. I like the Greek method of thinking about morality, which is much more relevant than the Judeo-Christian approach with regard to this type of phenomenon [the crimes of the Nazis]. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we are at fault, in sin, caught between sinful intentions and sinful actions. The Greek attitude is much more straightforward. I mention this in the book: when Oedipus kills Laios, he does not know that Laios is his father, but the gods don't give a damn; he killed his father. He fucks Jocasta, not knowing that she is his mother, but that changes nothing—he is guilty, basta. Intention does not come into play. We approached the postwar trials in this way, and it is the only way to proceed. So-and-so commited such an act, irrespective of the reasons that led him to do so. Whether he did it in good faith, in bad faith, whether he did it for money or because he believed in its cause, that's his problem: he commited the act, and he will be judged and condemned. That's all. Then, there are people who are executed, others who are imprisoned, some who are freed; some are never even arrested in the first place. It simply isn't fair; but that's the way it is.

Never mind that in the Jewish ethical tradition actions certainly can suffice to establish culpability—though "it simply isn't fair; but that's the way it is" is not its philosophical conclusion. Indeed, the question of intent did create confusion during some of the postwar trials. As Rebecca Wittmann describes in her excellent book *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial*, starting in 1963, as the statute of limitations for murder was starting to run out, twenty of the "order-followers" from Auschwitz—including administrators, dentists, barracks commanders, medical orderlies, a doctor, a pharmacist, and a "disinfector"—were tried in Frankfurt. It was the intention of the West German attorney general Fritz Bauer to put the entire "Auschwitz complex" on trial. But the law prohibited retroactive legislation, which meant that the defendants could not be charged with crimes against humanity, like the Nazis at Nuremberg. Instead the prosecutors were stuck with a definition of murder dating from 1871, which required that they prove the individual motivation and initiative of each perpetrator in order to convict him of murder.

This definition, not surprisingly, worked to hinder the prosecution of the cogs. If the perpetrator of murder was the person who willed or intended the crime rather than the person who pulled the trigger, then the murder of millions in the gas chambers had to call for a lighter sentence than the murder of a single person performed under one's own initiative. In a supreme irony, the prosecutors thus implicitly legitimated the perpetrators' worldview, the Nazi bureaucratization of evil, with the witnesses sometimes reinforcing the "innocence" of "those who did not act brutally or on personal initiative" and "describing those who murdered reluctantly as, relatively speaking, 'decent men' (*anständige Männer*)," Wittmann writes. "As a result, only the most grotesque and shocking of crimes were severely punished, while mass murder conducted through the machinery of genocide, the gas chambers and the crematoriums, receded into the background." Though Littell claims to believe the opposite, *this* is the system that his book finally endorses.

If Littell's novel were content merely to draw an exhaustive, moderately familiar, sometimes factually incorrect, but occasionally illuminating picture of the Nazi apparatus, it would be inconsequential. But in its attempt to impose its version of an ancient Greek framework on this modern system of destruction, it crosses the line from amorality to something worse.

It is erroneous (does this really need to be said?) to compare the crimes of Oedipus with the crimes of the Nazis. Yes, there are surface similarities: Oedipus did not know that he was killing his father, just as some of the Nazis may not have been aware of the consequences of their actions. But the decisive difference is that the story of Oedipus is a story of fate, a tragic tale of cosmic determinism. The story instructs that we cannot escape destiny. If we commit a crime, even unawares, it still counts as a crime, and we

Art

I thought I was hearing
the heat coming on
ticking the pipes
but it was a can
of paint
being shaken, it was
a thumb
cocked on a nozzle
before the word
was called into being—
then came the hiss
of breath
and a name.
It was very late
and I was up reading,
alight on the thumb
fly on the wall
and did not call
the cops on the sound.

LIA PURPURA

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will still be punished for it. That is how the gods will it. If the gods have foreordained that we kill our father and marry our mother, there is no escaping our lot, not even by the wiliest mortal stratagems. In this universe, human choice is not moral choice, because choice is not freely made. We weep for the protagonists not least because we recognize that they are, in all their grandeur, trapped.

But the crimes of the Nazis were not foreordained. Hitler was not a god; and to the best of anybody's knowledge, no God or gods decreed that the Jews should be exterminated. The Nazis who carried out the final solution, from the gardener to the Reichsmarschall, did so of their own free will. Yes, we know that people were coerced to join the Nazi party; and that they joined the SS and the Wehrmacht for all kinds of reasons; and that they feared harm to themselves or to their families if they took steps to aid the Jews. But finally they were not slaves. They were able to exercise their free will. They chose to give in and go along. (The surrender of freedom is also an act of freedom.) We know this because some Nazis did choose to defy their orders and not commit certain crimes, and sometimes (Littell shows this too) had nothing to fear from making such a choice.

The novel's Greek conceit goes even further. For Aue's character has another dimension. On the surface, as we have seen, he leads a relatively normal life as a Nazi functionary—perhaps an exceptionally cool one, but nonetheless an *anständiger Mann*. But at the same time he is, quite literally, a character out of a Greek tragedy. He is sexually obsessed with his twin sister, from whom he was separated as a teenager when his mother and stepfather caught them in a sexual act. As a result, he has for years nursed a grudge against them that erupts when, visiting them at home in Antibes while on leave, he apparently slips into a fugue state and murders them both. The murder is not described in the text—Aue says he fell asleep and awoke to find the bodies—but based on the physical evidence, our knowledge of his deranged mental state, and the continual references to Aeschylus and Sophocles, the conclusion is obvious, both to the reader and to the two SS police officers who wind up investigating the case. And in case we do not get it, Aue mentions having performed, with great conviction and gusto, the title role in Sophocles's *Electra* during his school days: "The butchery in the House of Atreus was the blood in my own house."

For Aue, an almost comically obvious figure out of Freud, sexual pleasure is irretrievably entangled with his anger toward his mother. Its primary cause, even before the separation from his sister, was her marriage to his stepfather after his father failed to return from the first war. As a teenager, he performed an act with a sausage destined for the dinner table that makes Portnoy's liver abuse look like fine dining. As an adult, he turns to anonymous homosexual sex in the belief that being penetrated by men allows him to identify further with his sister, to "feel almost everything she felt." Aue's incestuous obsession reaches a climax, if you will pardon the expression, toward the end of the book, when he camps out alone in her mansion in Pomerania (she and her husband have fled to Switzerland in anticipation of the Russian advance) and surrenders himself to days and nights of near-constant fantasy and masturbation, fueled by alcohol and fever. These scenes of depravity are related in unsparing detail. In one fantasy, he and his sister sit at an elegant dining table, eating and drinking their own excrement. (While a certain focus on shit may be justifiable in a book that treats the *anus mundi*, Littell's interest in it is obsessional. Maybe he has read too much Bataille.) In another, he sodomizes her on a guillotine.

Obviously a man who has sex with his sister, strangles his mother, and axmurders his stepfather cannot be called an "ordinary" man or an "ordinary German." He is not "just like us." This evil is not banal. So how, then, are we to understand the disconnection between the butchery in Aue's private life and his implacably correct professional demeanor? Does Littell mean to suggest that, in contrast to Arendt's formulation, one can be at once a practitioner of bureaucratic evil and also a monster? If so, this would seem to contradict the argument of the novel: its exhaustive demonstration that the extermination of the Jews was not the work of one man, or even of an important cadre at the top of the Nazi party, but rather by thousands of drones. Are we supposed to think that all the Nazi functionaries—including Eichmann, the very epitome of the Nazi "desk-murderer," who appears many times in the book and whom Littell describes as a man who would have been equally happy trading horses as transporting Jews to Auschwitz—could have been secretly butchers after all? If Aue's incest is supposed to denote his descent from civilization into barbarism, one wonders why his participation in genocide does not suffice to make that point. Who needs incest when you have Auschwitz? Anyway, genocide is perfectly compatible with civilization, as Nazi Germany proved.

Or, since Aue makes no sense psychologically as a realistic character, perhaps we are meant to see him as a symbol—a kind of *Jedermann*, an every-German. Perhaps he stands for Germany as a whole: a calm, well-educated, well-controlled country that from time to time gave itself up to untrammeled outbursts of savagery. During the Battle of Stalingrad, Aue sustains (and miraculously survives) a bullet through his skull, which leaves him with a literal hole in his head, "a narrow circular corridor, a fabulous, closed shaft, inaccessible to thought"—a symbol of Germany's own blind spot? And the incestuous twin relationship calls to mind the German myth of Siegmund and his sister Siegelinde (popularized, you will recall, by Wagner).

The twin motif serves also as a metaphor for a theme that Littell seems to regard as some kind of intellectual breakthrough: the "twinship" of Jews and Germans. This equivalence is an old idea, and it used to be regarded as very brilliant, as one of the colossal ironies of history. Various scholars (including Arendt) have drawn various analogies between the Jews and the Germans, but they always turn out to be a matter of mere appearances. In Littell's case, this is quite literally so: watching Hitler speak, Aue hallucinates that the Führer is wearing a prayer shawl, tefillin, and sidecurls. At one point, Aue mentions the strange fact that he was circumcised owing to a childhood disease, but this is dismissed as not uncommon, and it is never mentioned again. (In fact, as Piotr Rawicz described many years ago in his hilarious and unforgettable novel *Blood from the Sky*, medical excuses for circumcision were hard to procure, since Jewish men, unsurprisingly, also tried to get them.)

Despite the parodic quality of its deep, dark symbolism, this interpretation is in some ways more plausible. But it certainly does not ring true as a representation of what went wrong in Germany. A person can appear rational on the surface and yet succumb to occasional bouts of insanity. But a nation cannot go crazy. The Shoah was *not* a spontaneous eruption of irrational violence. As we know—and as Littell's own book demonstrates—it was designed and carried out by human beings, laid out in endless memos and debated in countless meetings.

But the greatest incoherence in *The Kindly Ones* concerns the question of

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retribution. Whether we agree with Littell's mechanism for getting there or not, we have established that Aue is guilty of certain crimes. According to so-called "Greek thought," he performed the acts, regardless of his intent, and so he must pay. *But Aue does not pay*. The cosmos stops in the middle. In the novel's puzzling conclusion, the two detectives who have been on his heels—are they the Eumenides?—are dispensed with. As the Russians descend on Berlin, Aue escapes to France. The novel concludes with the line, "The Kindly Ones were on to me." (An odd but not indefensible translation of the original, "*Les Bienveillantes m'ont trouvé*.") But we already know that he will live out his days in peace and quiet at the lace-making factory. This is, to say the least, an odd conclusion for "the Greek method of thinking about morality." In Greek tragedy, sinners are not paroled to the French countryside. If the Furies are supposedly on to him, what's keeping them? The answer, I suspect, is the writer's standpoint. Finally Littell's attitude toward all this evil is neither Greek nor Judeo-Christian. It is pornographic. He is raptly, cravenly, fascinated. And fascination is a great impediment to thought.

A review cannot convey how deeply unpleasant the experience of reading *The Kindly Ones* is. This is one of the most repugnant books I have ever read. Some may put aside its philosophical and aesthetic confusions, and take its utterly persuasive evocation of depravity as a sign of achievement. But if getting under the skin of a murderer were sufficient to produce a masterpiece, then Thomas Harris would be Tolstoy. No, there is something awry in this book's unremitting immersion in Aue's worldview, without any effort—direct or indirect, latent or manifest, philosophical or artistic—to balance or counteract it in any way. Littell told an interviewer for *Figaro* that Aue was "a possible version of myself, if I had been born German in 1913 rather than American in 1967." Whether or not he realizes it, this is a long way from "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*." He has not merely portrayed his protagonist, he has surrendered to him. No wonder he told the same interviewer that Aue is a "quite a decent guy." Arendt observed about Eichmann that "the longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak [without clichés] was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else." It is ironic that this novel, which of course will kill nobody, suffers from precisely such a collapse of empathy. ◆

David Thomson
WISHIN' AND MOPIN'

DUSTY!: QUEEN OF THE POSTMODS
By Annie J. Randall
(Oxford University Press,
219 pp., $24.95)

We do our best to keep up, those of us tottering into the back of The New Republic's book once a fortnight. So I have my work and my life as well as those of my wife and children. I have revenues to raise and taxes to pay. On Super Bowl Sunday, I cared just about enough to watch the game, though I was more certain to watch Chelsea versus Liverpool, live, in the West Coast morning. I hope to read a couple of books a month. I worry, but I like to have time for doing nothing. And most months I hope to have some time—even if it is drive-time—when I can listen to Mahler or Schubert, Shostakovich or Charlie Parker. I do my best—we all do. But it is never enough. So one day recently, hurrying through the living room, I passed a sprawled fourteen-year-old (mine) who had the television tuned to some kaleidoscope of British pop music in the 1960s. And there was this light bulb of a girl, her hair and her dress like upside-down tulip blooms, shaking from side-to side, with her tomboy/black voice clear as a bell, singing "I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself."

"Dusty" I said, without stopping. It looked like footage from *Ready, Steady, Go!*, that weird pop music show on commercial television in Britain in the mid-1960s, introduced by Cathy McGowan, who treated a comma in her script as if it was an orgasm. Suddenly I remembered. And a few hours later there I was in a bookstore, just as distracted, looking for something else, when I saw Dusty again beneath her hive of hair on the cover of this book.

An Oxford University Press book, no less! I opened it up, and this is what I read: "Though much of the book concerns discourses, especially those revolving around Dusty's pastiche and identity disruption, its discussions carry a significant caveat concerning the evacuation of meaning and 'waning of affect' that, according to Fredric Jameson, characterize postmodern cultural products. Audience perceptions of depth and feeling in Dusty's performance call into question Jameson's fleeting 'intensities' while her work's artful surfaces, unhooked from 'natural' moorings, point to new rather than absent content." Really, that is what it said. But "identity disruption" had me hooked. I knew it was my calling, evacuation of meaning or no evacuation of meaning, to get Dusty Springfield into the back of this book.

Here is some of what I learned. The first thing was that any Dusty singles or albums I had ever owned—I mean vinyl—were long since gone. So I went to the aircraft hangar called Amoeba Music on Haight Street in San Francisco and asked where I might find her. "Oldies" was the owlish answer, said as if I ought to know better for asking. Oldies! Well, the same store does classical now, and Bach and Haydn have been dead so much longer than Dusty. But "Oldies" was special as a term of abuse: it didn't mean "old" or "classical" even, it meant something we might make fun of. I mention this because Professor Randall's book has a good deal to say about Dusty being "camp," but suddenly I realized that so much in pop is camp after the first time you have heard it. So, as I recall, girls and boys alike would sing-along with Dusty, they would "do" her, in a way that made it clear that even her original performance had been "doing" someone, even if it was only herself. Pop movies have the same steep gradient after debut—they become commentaries on themselves, more or less comic ones.

So the feeling that was there once, at the beginning, in the very first time, is almost immediately mocked—and there, I think, you have the beginning of Dusty Springfield's dilemma. She had a notion of being the greatest girl singer there ever was, and of reducing or raising the world to tears. She would be Judy Garland or Shirley Bassey. But she was Dusty Springfield. It was the name for a hero next door in a boy's comic book from the 1930s or earlier. But Dusty was trying to be Judy Garland and look like Kim Novak crossed with Doris Day and Sandra Dee. Talk about identity disruption.

David Thomson is the author most recently of Have you Seen? A Personal Introduction to 1,000 Films *(Knopf) and* Try to Tell the Story *(Knopf).*

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She was born Mary O'Brien in West Hampstead in 1939, and she was raised in Ealing, the child of Irish Catholics. The world that she inhabited was about to explode, and in the great rush of 1963–1964, when Dusty was part of the movement that included the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, she was the girl singer. But this is not to say that Mary O'Brien was liberated. Her upbringing was probably strict and enclosed, and she came of age the wrong side of the sexual revolution, the upheaval in fashion sense, and the large empowerment of young people economically. So Dusty was brave, husky, flirty, a soul singer in her odd way, singing songs of need and desire, but she was also masked. Even at the time her fans used to wonder, "What does Dusty look like?": her battlements of hair, her wrap-around dresses, and her street-cleaning eyelashes actually hid her. It was guessed that she did not have a very good body—and she dressed as if swaddled. When you see pictures of the teenager from the mid-1950s, that kid is unrecognizable. Dusty had done dress-up in a very big way.

Professor Randall stresses how far Dusty was attracted to black soul singers and the "grainy" voice of their singing. Her friendships and a lot of her work seem to prove this. But this book misses a big beat, I think, in not remarking on the influence of Shirley Bassey, surely one of the most immediate forces behind Dusty. Bassey was black, or half-black: she was the child of a West Indian seaman, and came from Tiger Bay, the rough part of Cardiff. Bassey never hid her body or her lust: her clothes boasted about her body and some of her songs were banned by the BBC for sexual suggestiveness. She was never a rock singer, but neither was Dusty, really, no matter that she seemed to coincide with that wave. Bassey was a big, emotional diva in the school of Garland or Piaf, but her own mistress, too. She sang her heart out. And Dusty—whatever her sexual confusion—was the same way at first, struggling against the rigid recipe for girl singers in Britain.

So Mary O'Brien began in groups and with her brother: with Tom Springfield and Tom Feild she was part of The Springfields doing "Island of Dreams" in 1962. They toured America, where Dusty is supposed to have heard and been marked by soul singers. She became a great enthusiast of Motown and its style: girl groups, harmonized background singing, urging and surging the lead singer forward, and the wall of sound. It would be said later, in an age of white studio arrangers and orchestrators, that Dusty did a lot of her own song-styling, and the core influence was the grandiose Phil Spector: songs that seemed to rise up like coiled snakes, with a tentative and plaintive voice that then broke on the listener like a wave. That was the trick to "I Only Want to Be With You," and then, in 1966, "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me," her greatest hit—number one in England, number four in the States.

Those were her glory years, and she worked ferociously. As well as touring America, she hosted and helped to organize a Motown edition of *Ready, Steady, Go!*. She sounded black and she used people such as Madeline Bell and Martha Reeves as back-up singers. She loved to do that doo-wop stuff herself, and seemed to enjoy the automated movements of the back-up line as much as she teased them. She was a seasoned pro, and sometimes gave the feeling of stress-tested plastic, no matter that she had a penchant for very emotional songs and torrential, breast-beating confessionals—"Stay Awhile," "Wishin' and Hopin'," "Twenty-Four Hours from Tulsa," "Losing You" and the Jacques Brel song "If You Go Away," where she lingers over the French refrain as if the words were drops of blood seeping from her marble brow.

She improved a good deal as a singer, but she looked the same, and the look began to be a joke played against her. She never showed any talent as an actress (apart from doing pantomime in England), nor was she herself a songwriter. So she covered other people's songs ("The Look of Love," "The Windmills of My Mind"), and she went to America to make the album *Dusty in Memphis* in 1968, with Jerry Wexler as one of its producers. It included a hit single, "Son of a Preacher Man," but she also earned some criticism for so solemn an attempt to be black and American. Dusty was a very friendly girl, but she may not have appreciated how far black artists often resented white singers who took their songs and a lot of their royalties. Dusty had won praise earlier for refusing to sing for segregated audiences in South Africa, but she may not always have understood how far a similar unfairness was still at work in America.

Moreover, the music changed around 1968—the songs became more political, the look grew more natural, and sex and drugs had their day. Dusty Springfield was not really available for any of those clubs or movements, for desire is not the same as sex. She did not know how to look natural, and she preferred to hide behind the wall of unmet neediness and the heaped-up emotionalism of her songs. (Boy singers could say they weren't getting enough "satisfaction," but girls had to be careful—the pop audience is cultish, conservative, and cruel.) In real life she was or had become a lesbian, but she could find little way to express that in her music that did not risk losing her loyalist audience.

Of course, that happened in the end. By the early 1970s she was selling far less, and she didn't know what to do with herself. Professor Randall says that in the 1970s and 1980s, Dusty's career waned. The singer lived in America much of the time, in openly gay relationships. But she also turned to alcohol and drugs and suffered breakdowns. She "went away": "Where Is a Woman To Go?" was one of her last songs. There was a flurry of revival when the Pet Shop Boys asked her to join them on a wonderful album. There was always talk of comebacks. But the bright, bouncy girl died in 1999, of breast cancer.

This book has several causes to pursue, and takes the field of music studies for its audience. Professor Randall generally keeps clear of the life story, on the way up and the way down. She wants to see Dusty as a "postmod," a gay performer, a camp artist, and a tragedy. Along the way she comes up with a good deal of writing that might have left the real Dusty Springfield bored or bemused. That caution is worth heeding. I doubt that Ms. Springfield was ever looking for such a book, just as I see the far-fetched aspiration in those pages where the author links Dusty's arm movements with those in pictures of Sarah Bernhardt and eighteenth-century actresses. Yes, the motions are the same,

Ararat

As all the survivors of the ark burst ashore
in a happy pandemonium
chattering, roaring, howling for prey
lowing to be fruitful and multiply
while above their heads the rainbow hinted
that there would be no end again—the end came
for the fish without cares who lived
off the catastrophe like slippery swindlers:
now on the face of the stiffening earth
the writhing fins were stranded
and with gaping mouths they drowned in the air.

DAN PAGIS

Translated from the Hebrew by Leon Wieseltier

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but performers have to do something with their arms and their hands. There is evidence enough in the songs, and in those swooping movements where Dusty goes from pure ballad to storming melodrama, that she was a tragic actress—but maybe also a pretty cheerful person. On the other hand, *Dusty!* is fascinating, especially when it talks about her fans and the legion of imitators that she has inspired. In truth, she was a pastiche from the beginning: she seemed to be saying, "Imagine me on *Ready, Steady, Go!* doing it." But a great part of the rock revolution consisted in the empowerment to imitate.

Some girl singers crash—Billie Holiday, Judy Garland, Janis Joplin—but others go on into old age—Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, Joni Mitchell. It's very likely that they have a tougher time and a more violent crash than boy singers. It is almost certain that they need songwriters and arrangers of a talent to match their own. So, finally, why Dusty Springfield in the back of this book? In Britain, after all, there were a lot of other girl singers who also had a splashy moment: Petula Clark, Sandie Shaw, Lulu, Cilla Black. But there's the rub. Cilla—"our Cilla," from Liverpool, discovered by Brian Epstein, whom everyone thought "lovely," an entirely unmasked figure—gave up singing pretty quickly and became a successful and rich television presenter. She is a grandmother now and I hope she is very happy and looks back on her singing days as "fun." There are other British singers, Shirley Bassey and Cleo Laine, who are now Dames of the British Empire, beloved institutions and outstanding singers. Dusty got the OBE just before her death—perhaps the Queen liked her as much as I do, and heard the desperation, and what now seems like manic-depressive confusion. Perhaps it was Diana who recommended Dusty to Her Nibs. Reading this book, I had a day with Dusty on CD and it all came back. She had such need, but it sounds as if she knew it would never work. I hope the kids will go on listening to her in this brave new world where nothing works. ◆

David A. Bell
BECOMING FRANCE

CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION: THE FRENCH, 1799–1914
By Robert Gildea
(Harvard University Press, 540 pp., $35)

THE HISTORY of France in the "long nineteenth century" is bookended by slaughter. At one end stand the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, and at the other, World War I, both of which left the country traumatized, exhausted, and grieving for a lost generation. Remarkably, though, these two exercises in exsanguination have failed to overshadow the years in between as heavily as one might expect. France between 1815 and 1914 seems almost to belong to a different, and considerably happier, dimension of history.

Seen from the outside, the reason lies mainly in literature and the arts. The names suffice to tell the story: Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Zola, Proust, Ingres, Delacroix, Renoir, Manet, Degas, Monet, Rodin, Berlioz, to cite only the most obvious. Rarely, if ever, has a century in the life of a nation seen such a dazzlingly intense series of artistic achievements. The French are all too painfully aware that in the ninety years since World War I they have achieved nothing comparable; and the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to J. M. G. Le Clézio did nothing to change this fact.

In other respects as well, nineteenth-century France can be seen as something of a success story. In politics, it is certainly true that the years from 1800 to 1871 saw the country lurch back and forth between empire, monarchy, and republic, the transitions punctuated by vicious civil unrest—but the unrest was mostly short-lived (even the bloody Paris Commune of 1871 lasted only a few months), and had correspondingly small death tolls, at least in comparison with the earlier bloodletting of the French Revolution. And after 1870, France managed to transform itself into a relatively stable republic that arguably did a better job than any other nineteenth-century democracy in securing the rights and the liberties of its citizens (certainly better than the segregated, post-Reconstruction United States, or Great Britain dominated by wealthy landed and industrial interests).

Economically, the country remained relatively undeveloped. At the end of the nineteenth century, 41 percent of the French labor force still worked on the land, compared to just 9 percent of the British, and a large majority of the population lived in villages or small towns. The lives of French peasants were hard, sometimes brutally hard, but probably less so than those of industrial workers in a Manchester factory or a Pennsylvania coal mine. Moreover, most French peasants owned their own farms, and their children had increasingly good chances of social mobility, regularly moving from the land into teaching and the civil service. All in all, France probably weathered the century's industrial revolutions as well as any major Western nation.

In foreign affairs, the French avoided repeating the epochal disasters of Napoleon's First Empire for an entire century. True, Napoleon's nephew Louis-Napoleon, who ruled from 1848 to 1870 (first as president, then as emperor), had a weakness for ill-advised military adventures in such far-flung places as the Crimea, Mexico, China, and Italy. His brainless decision to go to war with Prussia in 1870 cost him his throne, and led to a German occupation of northern France, and deprived the country of Alsace-Lorraine. Still, by the bloody standards of modernity, the mercifully short Franco-Prussian War remains a relatively minor conflict.

The country's most dubious collective enterprise during this period is the one the French themselves took the greatest pride in: the acquisition of a vast colonial empire. By 1914, the tricolor flag flew across most of Western and North-Western Africa, Indochina, and a score of islands and enclaves across the world. In the twentieth century, France would pay for the conquests, the expropriation of resources, and the violent disruption of indigenous societies with its agonizing defeats in Vietnam and Algeria, and the dangerous social tensions connected with immigration from former colonies. But in 1914, few people could yet glimpse this imperial tragedy in the making.

THE ART OF reducing a long and varied history of this sort to a book-length narrative is not an easy one. All too often, historians boil away the complexity and the flavor, leaving nothing but an insipid textbook broth of familiar facts. Yet occasionally a talented and seasoned historian can undertake the exercise in such a way as to shape understandings of a subject well beyond the academy. Nineteenth-century France has attracted more than its share of such historians. In *France in Modern Times*, which covered the Revolution and the twentieth century as well, the liberal American Gordon Wright called

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attention above all to ideological conflict, and lucidly showed how ideology shaped the memory and interpretation of events, as well as the events themselves. The brilliantly eccentric Briton Theodore Zeldin, who wrote many volumes on the period 1848–1945, developed what he called a "pointilliste" method, which rejected traditional chronologies and built a larger picture out of thousands of tiny snapshots of lives and events, grouped under such idiosyncratic headings as "happiness and humor," or "logic and verbalism." The great French neo-liberal François Furet kept the focus relentlessly on politics and political philosophy, casting the period 1770–1880 as one in which France first succumbed to, and then slowly freed itself from, the great pathologies of modern politics, as expressed especially in the revolutionary Reign of Terror.

Robert Gildea has aimed to produce another work of this caliber, as part of a high-level new series. He does not match these illustrious predecessors, but he has produced a stimulating and highly readable, if somewhat uneven, volume. Despite its title, its story really begins in 1815, with only cursory treatment given to Napoleon I and his Empire. (The catastrophic Russian campaign of 1812, for instance, gets one-quarter of the space devoted to a trip to the Middle East by the poet Gérard de Nerval.)

With Zeldin as a large exception, nearly all previous students of the subject have seen their job as a kind of historical seismology, tracing out the profound and complex effects that the earthquake of the French Revolution wrought on France's political and social terrain. This is understandable enough. The French themselves remained obsessed with the Revolution, and defined their politics in relation to it until well after 1914. Furet went so far as to call his volume *La Révolution: 1770–1880*. Yet this choice of frame is also a pity, for it risks reducing some of the most interesting and original aspects of the story to little more than echoes of, and reactions to, the primal event. Most obviously, it is utterly inadequate as explanatory background for the stunning literary and artistic achievements. Yes, Stendhal and Victor Hugo were obsessed by Napoleon, and yes, the arts attracted brilliant and ambitious young men who might earlier have ventured into politics, but these facts tell us nothing about the character or quality of what was created. And while a longing for lost Napoleonic grandeur surely lay behind France's launching itself into the race for empire, this point explains little about the nature of the empire, or its future trajectory. Even in politics, historians run the risk of reducing a complex and continually evolving series of conflicts to an endless replaying of the same original revolutionary scenario.

Gildea's title would suggest that he has fallen into this same familiar pattern, and in fact the book begins with a rousing salvo of clichés on the subject: "On every generation to which it gave birth the French Revolution left its mark.... The Revolution divided the French into two irreconcilable camps." The introduction then continues with a reductionist survey of the nineteenth century as the story of five generations, each of which supposedly struggled with the revolutionary legacy in its own lockstep way. The "generation of 1800" was "intensely self-aware." The "generation of 1830" was "a generation of builders rather than dreamers." The generation of 1890 tended toward ideological extremes and had a "taste for action." Like clichés about "the greatest generation" and the "baby boomers" (perhaps not coincidentally, Gildea, born in 1952, belongs to the most talked-about generation in history), such generalizations are far too broad and shallow to tell us anything serious about the periods in question.

Fortunately Gildea is too good a historian to rest his work on such a flimsy scaffolding, and after the introduction the five generations vanish from the book almost entirely. More conventionally, but also more sensibly, *Children of the Revolution* actually divides the century into two broad parts, with the dividing line at 1870–1871, when a stable republic came into being following the disaster of the Franco-Prussian War. Moreover, despite occasional references to the marks, scars, wounds, traumas, etc. of 1789, the Revolution looms over the book much less than the title would suggest. Somewhat like Zeldin, Gildea has chosen to move away from any overarching narrative at all, by dividing each of his two parts into seven chapters that look, in turn, at politics, the provinces, class structure, religion, women, the arts, and the relation between France and the wider world (an additional chapter at the start of Part II tells the story of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune). At its best, this strategy works like a narrative *son et lumières* to illuminate different facets of the subject.

Like many British historians of France today, Gildea writes under the shadow not only of Zeldin, but of another great Oxford predecessor, Richard Cobb. Cobb devoted his career to the French Revolution, and told the story at street level, through the experiences of ordinary, often eccentric men and women struggling to survive in the political maelstrom, whom he adamantly refused to collapse into anonymous "masses" acting at the behest of abstract historical "forces." Writing from the perspective of the cynical, hard-bitten working class Parisians among whom he lived for many years, Cobb had particular scorn for ideology and high-flown rhetoric, dismissing the pretensions of the Jacobins as "Saint-Just's hideous cardboard Sparta." Gildea leaned particularly toward Cobb in his recent book *Marianne in Chains*, which examined the experience of ordinary French people under Vichy. Controversially, he reached the conclusion that collaboration with the Germans was not only more common, but also more defensible, than earlier historians had maintained.

Children of the Revolution is a more conventional book than Cobb or Zeldin would have written, but it bears their influence. Except for the two political survey chapters, which cram a century's worth of events into clear but rushed narratives, the book makes its points mostly through snapshots of individual lives. To illustrate the religious revival of the early nineteenth century, Gildea uses the tireless peasant-born priest Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney, curé of Ars (later canonized), whose confessional had an eight-day waiting list by 1845, even though he sometimes spent fifteen hours a day hearing confessions. Female work in the 1870s is personified by Jeanne Bouvier, who started in a silk-mill at age eleven, went on to a dizzying series of positions in domestic service, and then successively made her living as a hat-, corset- and dressmaker, earning anywhere from ten to forty-five francs a week, at the mercy of the economy and the season. As for literary figures, Gildea fails to resist the irresistible Germaine de Staël, daughter of the last chief minister of the Old Regime, lover of Benjamin Constant, eloquent novelist and penetrating liberal thinker. He also makes excellent use of the aristocratic salon hostess and feminist Marie d'Agoult, the lover of Liszt and romantic rival of George Sand.

In keeping with his delight in quirkily human exceptions to grand narratives, Gildea artfully deploys the sort of ironic quotations that quietly disrupt the expected story line. In retrospect, Emperor Louis-Napoleon may well appear reckless, erratic, and not overly bright, but just four months before he fell, Léon Gambetta, the future founder of the Third Republic, could declare that "the Empire is stronger than ever." Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir* may now stand as one of the great-

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est triumphs of French fiction, but at the time of its publication the public and the critics alike considered it a disaster, and in its first year it sold barely 1500 copies. On learning in 1831 that Simón Bolívar had died, Stendhal wrote to a friend: "Do you know from what? From envy at the success of the *Rouge*." The playwright Sylvain Maréchal has a reputation as one of the most radical defenders of Revolutionary republicanism, but in 1801 he could still publish a pamphlet entitled *Bill to Prohibit Teaching Women to Read*. And who was it that attacked Russian Jewish immigrants in 1890 as "these despicable people [coming] into a country that is not theirs"? None other than the wealthy, assimilated Sephardic Jewish literary critic Bernard Lazare.

Gildea's methods work well for the themes that he has identified as central. The chapters on the provinces show brilliantly how a generation of Romantic writers began to identify particular personalities for the different regions of France, rooted in a combination of geography, language, folklore, and custom. Gildea traces the growing tension between this vision and the demands of the rigidly centralized state apparatus inherited from Napoleon. "Everything moves towards Paris," he quotes the Second Empire's great urban planner Baron Haussmann, in 1859: "main roads, railways, telegraphs. Everything moves out from it: laws, decrees, decisions, orders, officials." Gildea particularly shows how state officials started to see the profusion of dialects and local languages (Breton, Basque, Gascon, Provençal) as a threat to national unity, and made instruction in standard French a priority for the school system. Yet the state did not attempt to eradicate these languages and provincial identities altogether, recognizing the need for provincials to identify with a folkloric "petite patrie" as well as the big national one.

Gildea's chapters on religion likewise manage the difficult feat of treating French Catholicism and anti-clericalism alike with sensitivity and understanding, while explicating the long, bitter quarrels between the two and also giving a full picture of French Jewry and French anti-Semitism. Gildea does not neglect the ferocity with which the French right attacked Jews in the last two decades of the century (culminating in the Dreyfus Affair), but he also shows the remarkable success achieved by French-born Jews at a time when most other Western countries still threw up far higher barriers to their social advancement.

The discussion of literature and the arts is less successful. Gildea does his best to fit them into a broad social and cultural context, but the pressure of covering so much greatness—not to mention such broad topics as "mass culture"—in fifty-odd pages leaves little room. He provides telling statistics, for instance, on increases in the reading public and book publishing (the first more than doubled between 1801 and 1871, while the second increased more than fivefold just between 1814 and 1866); but he fails to provide a key part of the explanation, which is that the replacement of expensive rag paper by cheap wood pulp allowed publishers to slash their production costs. In general, the treatment of modernism suffers from being kept separate from discussions of technological change, and the industrialized "modern life" that it struggled to represent. Here the dividing line of 1870 also becomes overly rigid, because it separates Baudelaire (pre-1870) from the Symbolist poets that he did so much to influence. And then there are odd omissions: Renoir, Rodin, and the entire subject of photography, which the nineteenth-century French largely created and then turned into an art form.

Most egregious is the way Gildea neglects the many things that do not fit into his chosen themes. He has no chapters on science or social science, so that major figures such as Comte and Pasteur go unmentioned. Marie Curie wins a brief mention only because of her gender, and Durkheim an even briefer one only because of his Judaism (something that would have distressed to no end this proud republican Frenchman). Material on technological change and the rise of industrial capitalism gets into Gildea's book only when relevant to class conflict, so that such large topics as the rise of the factory system pass essentially undiscussed. In his brief, rather scattershot treatment of international relations, Gildea neglects to mention most of Louis-Napoleon's adventures, including the interventions in China and Mexico, and the Crimean War.

Strangest of all, Gildea has little to say on the French colonial empire, particularly before 1870. In one of the two lengthy and informative chapters on women, he quotes the feminist Flora Tristan, in 1843, calling women "the last slaves who still remain in French society." Left painfully unmentioned is the fact that in 1843 French plantation owners in Guadeloupe and Martinique still kept enslaved hundreds of thousands of blacks, who had been freed during the Revolution, only to be re-enslaved by Napoleon. (The Second Republic, as readers will not learn from this book, finally abolished slavery for good in 1848.) Nor does Gildea give more than passing mention to the fact that by 1914 Algiers and other areas of North Africa had become in large part French, with considerable European settler populations, impressive French architecture, and the legal status of French departments. By 1914, few people in France actually thought of Algeria as a "colony" at all, preferring to see it the way Americans today see Hawaii. In practice, the French denied citizenship to those living under "Koranic law," and equally managed to keep the indigenous populations of West Africa in a subservient position, even while touting France's "mission to civilize" these supposedly benighted areas of the globe. Yet the rhetoric of "civilization" cut both ways, leading the French to invest considerable amounts in schooling, language instruction and physical infrastructure in the empire, and providing paths to full citizenship for a "meritorious" minority of the conquered (notably North African Jews). These policies would all have huge consequences for the history of France and its empire after 1914.

Until relatively recently, historians tended to play down this imperial history. Following the decolonization of the 1950s and 1960s, French commentators and historians tended, defensively, to redefine France's imperial ventures as a temporary phase in the country's history, whose natural arc led to the independence of the now "mature" colonies. But these ideas obscure the very different, and very central, place that the colonies held in French visions of their country in the previous century, and also the very real inter-penetration of colonial and metropolitan life, in economics, politics, and culture. It is too bad that Gildea reinforces the prevailing post-colonization views rather than challenging them, as so many historians have recently done. (Today roughly half of all dissertations on French history in North American universities focus on the empire.)

Still, no general survey can hope to treat all subjects equally. Furet, for instance, neglected far broader areas of the French experience in the nineteenth century (including imperialism), so as to focus intently on the alleged pathologies of French democracy. Robert Gildea has drawn very effectively on recent research in the areas he chooses to explore, and he presents his material in admirably lucid and entertaining prose. And, above all, he succeeds in one central task: showing just how surprisingly livable and creative France was during this golden century-long interval between two moments of horror. No wonder that so many remain nostalgic for it, and not just within the country's borders. ◆

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Washington Diarist

In Which We Engage

Is it really possible that in a Democratic administration the championship of human rights and the promotion of democracy will no longer figure conspicuously in the foreign policy of the United States? It is really possible. Oh, the stirring words will be spoken; the stirring words are always spoken. But in the absence of policies one may be forgiven for not being stirred by words. And so far even the language has been wanting in ardor. Idealism in foreign policy is so 2003. After all, the opposite of everything that George W. Bush believed must be true. He overreached abroad and underreached at home, so we will underreach abroad and overreach at home. Myself, I am for overreaching and overreaching. And so I remain chilled by Hillary Clinton's *froideur* in Beijing, by her artful impersonation of Brent Scowcroft. "We pretty much know what they are going to say," she offered in defense of her ritualistic syllables about China's persecution of its dissidents. She is right, of course. The regime in Beijing is singularly immune to moral appeals. They do not do ethical critique. It is also true that they are our creditors, though I do not see their hoard of T-bills invoked to thwart the discussion of our other demands of them. And I hear stranger excuses for the new hard-heartedness: a friend of mine, a smart and fervent liberal, chastised me for my disappointment in Clinton by reminding me sardonically that the Chinese "have only raised a hundred million people out of poverty". Not a word about health and literacy in Cuba, though. I thought that the question of the relation between political progress and economic progress—the priority, philosophical and political, of freedom to development—was long ago settled, and not in favor of early profits.

It appears that we need to recall, in this springtime of liberal realism, a few rudimentary notions about democratization and the cause of human rights. For a start, it does not require us to go to war. Rightly or wrongly, we invaded Afghanistan and Iraq for strategic reasons, for reasons of national security; and the splendid attempt to establish democracies, which may or may not succeed, was a corollary of a strategic analysis of the causes of our insecurity. Democratization, since it proposes to replace one political culture with another, is a policy of destabilization, and so it is an evolutionary enterprise, and takes time, and can be achieved only indigenously, by the people themselves. But often they need help, which, in the real world so beloved of Democrats, means American help. This help can take many forms. The scandal of Clinton's mildness in Beijing was not that she squandered an opportunity to convert the autocracy to our way of thinking about justice. It was that she scanted the men and women in China (and in Burma too, about which she found time only to speculate on the efficacy of sanctions) who already share our way of thinking about justice. It is one of the central features of our account of justice that it is universal: the sovereignties of nations and the specificities of cultures are (mostly) wonderful, but human rights make us all into cosmopolitans. When the Chinese foreign minister told Clinton that we should "continue to hold human rights dialogues on the basis of equality and mutual respect," he was speaking sinister nonsense. In this matter China is not our equal, it is our inferior, and we cannot respect them without disrespecting ourselves. What Clinton brought the many victims of Chinese repression was a cup of despair. On what grounds can she justify the demoralization of these valiant people, or their abandonment? (Here Niebuhr will not serve.) Who really believes that the full panoply of Chinese-American relations, our sensible preference for cooperation over conflict, cannot withstand the espousal of our ideals? In China, our values are hardly about to displace our interests; and China has interests, too. Anyway, it is an axiom of Barack Obama's worldview that the moral reputation of the United States is itself a fact of strategic consequence. The wretched of the earth have been waiting for America to rediscover—what? the balance of power?

The renaissance of diplomacy has begun. We will talk with Iran. We will talk with Syria. We will talk with the Taliban, or with some of it. We will talk, sooner or later, with Hamas. If what I think has happened has happened, the Awakening in Iraq has been promoted from a military approach into a geo-political approach. The whole world is now Anbar. It is not hard to see why. The sullen rectitude of Bush and Cheney was going nowhere. There are urgencies, such as the inexorable uranium of Iran, that will not allow us to leave any means untried. And if we flip Assad, or isolate Haqqani, it will be for the good. We must be in all things empirical: a dogmatic aggregation of all our enemies may blind us to useful complexities. So probe, probe, probe; let the word go forth to the madrassas in Waziristan and Swat and Qum and Gaza that we are all God's children; and never mind that we pretty much know what they are going to say. But sooner or later we will hit the limit of what conscience can bear. There are only so many tyrants and terrorists we can engage before we stain our principles, before the politesse becomes repulsive. Also, the anti-Americanism in the world cannot all be imputed to the recent behavior of the United States. Neither the president's face nor his name will inspire movements and governments to discard their dreams. I worry that liberal realists are mentally unprepared for certain eventualities. Liberal realism is either a betrayal of liberalism or a betrayal of realism. I wish the administration luck, but I wish it also a fallback plan.

A hawk has settled somewhere in my neighborhood, and the other morning it made its kill in my garden, beneath the nandina bushes festooned with red berries like ornaments for the slaughter. It sat with a lordly calm over its ripped prey, and when I approached for a closer look it flew off, its carrion in its claws, leaving a bloodied mess of pigeon feathers in the otherwise gentrified dirt. What was so fascinating about the savagery was that it made no sense to protest it. Here was realism, and the normativity of power. There was nothing sublime about it. I paused over the unnatural character of goodness. I re-read Mill: "the duty of man is the same in respect to his own nature as in respect to the nature of all other things, namely not to follow but to amend it." The idea of human rights is a distinction not only of our policy, but also of our species.

Leon Wieseltier

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